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Fantasy AND

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Second to the Skua

JULY

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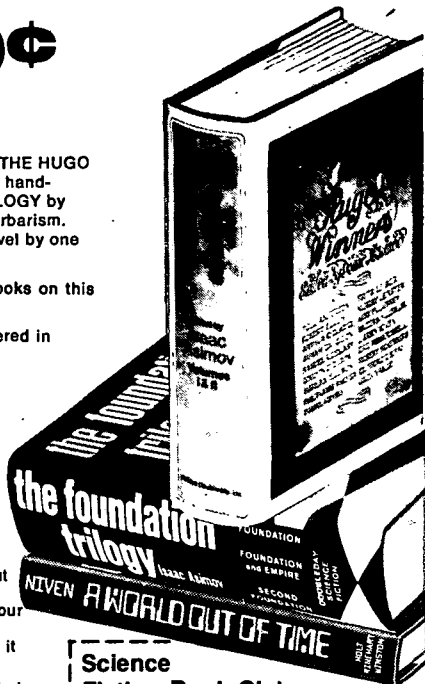
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The Syndicated Time

by **STERLING E. LANIER**

Time travel is a dirty word these days. A person can get lynched just for mentioning it, like people being arrested in the old days for joking about hijacking while boarding a jet. The UN, in one of those few cases where even the Maldive Islands and Cocos-Keeling voted on the same side, has agreed that no member nation will do anything but suppress any research on the subject. Many nations passed laws of their own dealing with the treatment of those apprehended while conducting any such research. My personal favorite is the one from Uganda. Some people get sick reading it, but those old devil Amin habits die hard.

Every country in the world is still looking for the possible inventor or (ess). Since I know who it was, I could command a hefty sum for the right squeal. The only trouble is, the loudest squeal might turn out to be mine. I couldn't fix an

out-of-phase water wheel, but I'm too deeply involved. I'm no inventor, but I *am* a promoter. I should say, an ex-promoter.

It all started with a greedy inventor. You think maybe Tom Edison wasn't greedy? Or read the fine clauses in the last Wright Brothers contracts. Yes, friends, they had a dream. Part of the dream was cash. Maybe only part, but still ... part.

My friend, or let's say acquaintance (if they ever get me, he was a deadly foe), was not like Tom Edison exactly, or the Wright Brothers either. He was a seedy little physicist at a third-rate, Florida, junior college. I never went there, or any other college, but I used to sell pirated texts, Formosa's best, to some of them back in my less affluent days. A flat campus, four decaying coconut trees; the lawn, solid sand spurs; the faculty, solid losers. The academic end of the line. If you re-

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tire after thirty years, you get \$12,000 before taxes and a plated Bulova. The janitors make more, and for once the state has right on its side. Through these hallowed halls pass a collection of out-of-state weed-heads, local rednecks, Northern heroin salesmen and apprentice whores equal to those found anywhere, that is until one comes, of course, to the next county. Need I say more?

I was motoring through Florida, searching, on behalf of a large conglomerate which shall be nameless, for vacant lands to develop. Bluntly, I was looking for places to put large, expensive condominiums, preferably smack on the beach sand, of course. My own employers, who I regret to say are, or were, *not* equal opportunity, owned a lot of them already, particularly on the west coast, the so-called "Sun Coast." They wanted more. Due to many of their other enterprises still being frowned on by the law, they had to work through middlemen. One of these was my employer, J. G. "Bushveldt" Barnstaffel, the President of Amalgamated Tourist Enterprises.

No one in this splendid firm had a record, including the president, which made it ideal for certain purposes. Barnstaffel was a skinny slob who had once been lost in Kruger Park, R.S.A., for three whole days, while on a world tour. This almost

incredible feat gave him his nickname.

"Check out the liddell colleges, Syd. Maybe some got left some land they can't use," he told me in his Dutch wheeze. He talked like George Washington or maybe Rip Van Winkle was his brother, but he was originally a simple Hollands crook, too inept for the Amsterdam police to tolerate. They flung him to the New World, or at least he decided to leave. He had fat hands, rheumy blue eyes, too close together, a bulbous red nose and an air of knowing everything in the world.

What does this have to do with the ban on time travel? "All history hangs on the actions of a few men (or women)." Lord Acton, or someone.

So, I pursued my merry way, from one Christawful motel to another, down the world's most architecturally fucked-up peninsula. And then, one day, in a bar I encountered Associate Professor Motley van D'Alliance III, once a faint gleam in the eye of the *New York Social Register*. As of the point I met him, he was a bleary little soak, leaning on the bar and trying to pick up anyone to talk to. I hasten to add that the professor was not gay, pausing to add that I have nothing against such persons, myself. Who knows who will betray you?

"You may not believe me," says

this small, drained-out lush on the next bar stool, "but I can save the world."

I removed an olive from my Manhattan and reordered, this being a typical Florida bar, and sat, waiting for the revelation. You get a mild laugh once in a great while from these type encounters.

"You might not think this," says this jerk, "but I am the Professor of Ascidian Ophiolatry at Southern Dugong College." He babbled on and I heard nothing, until, in the third martini, something came across. The words were "time machine."

He had red eyes, like a semi-albino or possibly a white rat of some obscure sort. The only word for him was "unwholesome." But, somehow, we got to talking. When I told him that my employers were looking for new coast land, he got all excited. "Coast land!" he yelled. "I'll give you coast land! How would you like the best islands in the world, the finest tropic shores, absolutely untouched. Never a human print on them! I guarantee it!"

Well, I normally don't encourage nuts. But this little weemer was so positive. Maybe it was the martinis. Cheap Florida gin made from orange pulp.

Anyway, I called the base, i.e., New York, that night, and, of course, I got Barnstafel. I had

nothing else to report, since there was nothing left to buy. But Bushveldt was simply in love with the idea of my nut professor. "Sounds like a great lead. Make sure you don't lose him. Follow it up." And more crap like that. I didn't get it then, but after I'd hung up, a thought occurred to me. Barnstafel sounded very anxious indeed. Maybe his unknown superiors, the boys with all the well-laundered financing, were leaning on him a bit? If these people asked the impossible, those on the end of the request often died trying. Literally.

Well, I had made an appointment with the little jerk. So the following day I got directions and motored out to the sun-browned series of vacant lots that Dugong called a campus. The heat, even for Florida, was blistering and my soles burned even through Ked rubber. I found his office in a moldering cube of puce-colored stucco, where the peeling paint and corroded metal vied with the exposed cinder block in a tribute to rip-off contracting.

He was crouched behind a crummy desk pretending to read a report when I walked in without knocking. The blinds were down and the place was so dark, I thought I'd stumbled into a broom closet by mistake. When I twitched up the venetians, the place was hardly bigger, and I rated van

D'Alliance a *U* on the alphabet scale of any college rank. For Christ's sake, it wasn't air-conditioned, even!

He gave a pitiful moan as the light hit his eyes, but I perched myself on his desk and inspected the place at leisure.

"What do you want?" he quavered. "I'm not seeing students today. I have work to do. What class are you in, anyway?"

I now discovered that the red in his eyes was caused by innumerable tiny broken veins, which were matched by mottled skin of the same color on his sunken face. Only his suit, which, though pretty soiled, was new, prevented him from an appearance on Skid Row as a major lead.

"Remember me?" I said, in soft tones. He winced because any tones must have hurt. "I'm the guy you were telling about all those untouched beaches, the virgin palmy islands and junk like that which you were going to give to me. I want to hear more about them, that's all. Remember, we made a date at the Soapstone Pelican last night?"

"I did?" he mumbled. "I forgot. I must have had one too many. I didn't know what I was saying." He rose, or rather lurched to his feet. "Now if you don't mind, I'm feeling quite ill. There must have been a mistake. Please, run along, there's a good chap, and let's forget

the whole thing." In the tiny, shut office, his stale breath was sheer murder, being half booze and half pyorrhea. But I'd stood worse.

When I'd mentioned the reason I was there, a light had flickered in back of the beat-up face, the eyes had glittered and the mouth worked. This piece of academic flotsam *knew* something, or at least he thought he did. This was the only reason I didn't blow the unwholesome joint and leave him to his d.t.'s.

"Now, now," I said soothingly. "Let's not take that attitude. Have you any classes today? At my tasteful motel, we can lounge by the crystal pool and partake of cool beverages. Just the thing for a man in your condition. Then, if you feel like going further into the aforesaid matter, it's up to you." What a man in his condition really needed was oxygen, vitamin B-12 injections and restraint, not necessarily in that order.

I had the sorry bastard hooked in one sentence. After that office, cool drinks and someone else paying, by a pool, must have sounded like Paradise. He hesitated an easy split second, the stumbled around his desk, croaking, "I'll have one with you for old-times' sake. What did you say your name was? Have you got a car?"

I gave him the name I was registered under, which we'll call Joe

Doakes, and led him out to my air-conditioned Toyota. He almost fainted from the cool as we pedaled off campus, but the first gin and tonic by the pool pepped him up in no time. Maybe the dank reek of chlorine and the grinding and screeching noises from the highway out front added to the glamor. It was the off season, so the place was almost empty, and I had provided lots of gin (not the orange-pulp variety) and ice.

He'd reached a stage of his drinking life that I'd had lots of experience with in the past, starting with my own old man. I don't think the guy was ever what you'd call sober, but he probably never was really flat-out drunk either. He just coasted along in a paranoid fog of dreams, frustrated ambitions, half-started projects, meaningless fucked-up jobs and general discontent. These types of people always have a glorious past and a fantastic future. During the now, or present, they are always being held back or harried by treachery, infidelity and corruption in high places, plus fire, plague and the Loch Ness Monster. All I had to do was sit back, listen and pour, judging his intake with a careful orb. Some of them fade like a quarterback at one gill too many.

I heard all about the van D'Aliances to open with. "Would you believe, my dear chap, grandmother had footmen in *powder*? I mean

people knew what was *due*, then!" And the balls at the Waldorf. And his club at Yale. And his mother. And the Southampton Yacht Club. And his first, or society wife (she was too good for him, of course). And so on, *adbullshititem*.

When he'd caromed off the New York Racquet Club, "my dear chap," for the third time and was starting a second round of "if they could only see me now!" I judged it was time for the kill.

Ever so gently, I leaned over and glared into his glazed eyes from about one inch away.

"But you'll show them, Motley!" I hissed at him. "You'll be batting those racquets with the best of them!" I paused. "*When you find all those lovely islands or palmy shores you were talking about last night! That's when you'll be back where you belong!* Old chap," I added.

He was pretty far gone into his private dream world, and I'd gone and yanked him back by his zipper, but I'd also, please note, added the dream world to my own question. He gulped some gin while it sank in. Then a funny, kind of shy look came over him and, with it, that same flicker I'd seen before, in his cubicle.

"Well," he mumbled. "It's not fully tested yet." He gulped more booze and his face got redder. "In fact, to be honest, it might not work

at all." He stared at the pool. "I haven't dared make many tests. I *think* it works, but that's not enough for a scientist, old chap." For one fleeting moment, damned if I didn't feel sorry for the useless, dumb bastard. For a whole second, I thought I saw something that maybe might have once been a real scientist.

"I suppose it has commercial uses. Possibly even military," he was going on, "but I can't finance proper tests. I'm at the end of the line, even down here. They won't renew my present contract. I can't get a job at a shitty high school, if this place goes and blackballs me." He stared at me in what he must have thought of as honest candor or something. He just looked polluted, defeated, overripe and stale. His voice lowered in confidence. "The fact is, old chap, I have a slight drinking problem, nothing serious, but" He reached eagerly for the bottle, but I snaked it away first.

"Now look, Motley," I purred. "I just happen to work for some very big interests. Very large on the cash flow, understand. People who *back* real science and *real* discoveries. With good old honest *cash*. These are *important* people, Motley, old chap. Ever heard of C. J. Wallingford? He's on the board, in fact, he's one of the men I report to. The biggest, see?"

Needless to affirm, I had never

heard of C. J. Wallingford, either, but this sorry soak brightened up at once. "Ah, of course, Shaker Heights people. Made their money in corsets, but still quite acceptable. How is the old man?"

"He's great, a grand old boy. And he's backing this group to the hilt, Motley. *To the hilt*. He'll be counting on you, if things go right.

Whoever might be counting on him, or me either, I couldn't say for sure. Beyond and above Barnstafel, the office chatter differed, opinions ranging between the Salupo Family of Brooklyn and the Figliosi Clan, with interests in Philadelphia and Miami. None of us really wanted to know, to be honest. The letter, to misquote from the Good Book, ain't all that kills.

I hauled my mad scientist back from his lost world of Grosse Point, or wherever he'd got to, and now gave him the works, plus a small gin. He'd long since forgotten the tonic and even the ice.

"Now look, Motley," I said. "You know and I know, you didn't just gabble about islands and such last night. You also used two magic words. They had to do with *time*, right? So let's discuss that aspect, like good chums, eh?"

He didn't turn pale, or anything, to my surprise. I think by now, what with the intake of battery acid and all his childhood memories, he'd fitted *me* into his

crazy mental world, like I belonged there. He looked at me and slurped down some more gin.

"Well, it's at the house. Can't have a thing like that at the college, old chap. They'd steal it or say I was crazy." He giggled and looked at his cheap wristwatch. Of course it had stopped.

"Maybe we could go and look," I coaxed. "It's only just a little before noon. We could take a bottle in case we get tired, himm?"

This made him look eager and nervous at the same time. "I don't know, old man. My wife, you know. Splendid woman and all that. Not quite my own class, you know, but splendid. Still, she gets a bit annoyed at times. Thinks I drink too much, you know." Again I snatched the booze away from questing fingers.

"That's easy," I said. "Look, we sneak out to your place, all very quiet. Should your frau get a peek at us, why I'll tell her we're discussing big business, very big money, and please not to interrupt. What can you lose?"

He looked impressed and I poured him another small bite which increased his pleasure. Then I capped the bottle, the second bottle, that is, and stuffed it into a paper bag as I stood up.

He lived in the kind of scruffy subsection, which, to be fair, cannot be blamed on the Sunshine

State alone. A lot of nasty little piles of congealed cinder block, all exactly alike, squatted inside an imitation brick gate, which said on top, "El Dorado Gardens." That is, it should have, but the *D* and one *o* were missing, making it "El rado Gardens." The van D'Alliance manse was even crappier than the average, but a broken television antenna hanging off over the roof and roosting on a dead palm tree gave it that different look. The grass was dead too, the windows were shuttered, and the dump looked abandoned.

"Charming," I said as we pulled up under his carport, which incidentally was full of holes. "A real haven of rest, away from the workaday world." He was plastered but not that far gone, and he gave me a dirty look as I helped him out of the car.

Just behind the carport was, logically, a small, one-car garage. This was padlocked, not once but twice. It took Motley three tries to fish out both keys and get the locks off, but he finally made it. He pushed feebly at the sliding overhead door, and I finally had to help him. He wobbled over to one side and switched on a light, then managed to pull the door back down. I noticed he bolted it, too. Maybe he was a nut, but he at least thought he had something worth protecting. A window built into one wall of the

room was filled with a window-unit air conditioner. We were sealed in.

The place was a mess and smelled as stale as its owner. There were rusting tools all over the concrete floor. A long work bench held more of them, plus a lot of oddly shaped bits of metal and also lots of wires, some in coils and others strung about in weird patterns. But in the middle, close to the back wall, was something else. It was a great big metal box, really, about six feet square, with gauges all over the outside. It was very thick metal, which I could see because it had a round door, like a porthole, and this was open. Actually it looked more like one of those thick hatches you see on a submarine, and you could also note it had heavy clamps. A kid of six could have scrunched into the inside of this box thing, but nothing much bigger.

I decided to goose him a little.

"What's that junk pile?" I said with a nasty smile. "The famous time machine? Can you bring back Cleopatra and things like the Atlantis Treasures, maybe? How about King Tut or something?"

He woke up a little and looked serious, but not really angry.

"No," he said slowly, "no, it won't do that. I'm not quite sure what it *will* do. I built it with a legacy from a great aunt, you know, had the thing constructed and as-

sembled over in Jacksonville to my own specs. But it's funny. It goes back about eighty to one hundred and fifty million years, and I can't seem to change it. I can't get it closer and I can't make it go forward either, not at all. There must be something I haven't figured out yet." This calm statement made a prickle of ice run down my spine. I'd been discounting this silly jerk all the way, but he sounded so *sure!*

"You mean," I said, in what I hoped sounded like a relaxed voice, "this box goes back into *time*, real *time*, eighty million years?"

"No. no," he said petulantly, "not the box, as you call it. That's the gate. It's what you put into the box that goes back." There was a silence while I tried to think.

"OK," I said, after a minute, "so how do you know it's like eighty million years, say, not ten minutes or a million, million years?"

"I don't know, not exactly," he said in weary tones. "I'm not a geologist, a botanist, or a paleontologist either, and I'd really need to be all these to be anything like sure." He eyed the paper bag. "Let's have a little snort. I'll go get some ice from the house. While I'm gone, you look into this stuff and I'll try and explain it when I come back." He pushed a box like an oversized foot locker into the light and unlocked it. Then he turned the air

conditioner on and unbolted the door and left. He seemed to be making a lot more sense since we'd reached his workshop, and I didn't know whether that was good or bad.

Meanwhile, I looked into the box, and since there was a lot of junk inside, I began to lift things into the light.

First came some dried plants, tall round things, like reeds or cat-tails, but with short spiky leaves all the way around, arranged in rings. They meant pure nothing to me. Next came some dried branches of a pine tree, with huge flat needles. I dumped this with the other dead vegetables. Next, so help me, was a big stoppered jar, filled with alcohol or some such preservative gorp, and floating in it was a dead rat! It had an open mouthful of sharp, pointy teeth and a furry tail, but was still a reject from the local drainage system, for my money.

Now I was down to a small cardboard box. I opened this and it was full of little broken pieces of something like coarse yellow paper, but with a pebble-grain surface like my English shoes. Some of the pieces were round or even dimpled.

There only was one more box, a large one, that took up most of the big container's bottom. I opened this, and for the first time found something that really shook me. It was some bones, and they were im-

pressive all right. I took them out and carefully put them on the floor, just as I heard Motley return. He was carrying a plastic ice bucket and some bottles of soda, which I guess were for me. While he rebolted his door, I took a hard look at those bones again.

They smelled terrible and had brown pieces of gut, muscle or whatever, dried onto them. But they were obviously part of a leg or maybe arm or foot. There were two great big round claws, something like a chicken's but three times that size, and places where some more had been broken off. I felt Motley relieving me of the gin, and the clink of ice, but I didn't look up, even. I laid out the two long bones again, and one was broken like the foot or hand thing. They were at least three inches around the middle and, even broken, three feet long. I felt that old creepy chill on the spine again and reached up for a drink which Motley handed me in silence.

"All right, Professor," I said in as nice and easy a voice as I could, "what is all this crap? Take it from the top; start with the dried leaves."

"I'm not *sure*," he said, pouring a second dram for himself, and me too. I didn't turn it down.

"I had to find a lot of my data in books I wasn't trained to use, my dear chap. None of this is in my

field, you know." He inhaled some gin, but his voice was steady enough as he went on.

"Those round plants, like reeds with a trim, are called horsetails, I think, *Equisetums* or something. The only modern ones found now are about six inches long, I believe. Notice that both ends of the stalks are shaved off smoothly? That's the time machine. The plants may have been twenty feet high. They were green when I got them."

I looked at the stalky plants and he was right. They'd been cut off real smooth at each end.

"So what," I growled. "I've seen bamboos that big here in Florida. What's with this pine tree?"

"Well, that one is a puzzler. But I think it's a sequoia, a sort of Redwood, very like the big trees in California. They used to grow all over the world, it seems. Just a guess, of course." The gin bottle gurgled again. I removed it politely.

"The little box full of things are certainly broken egg shells. We have tortoises — turtles, you know — right here, on the campus actually, that lay eggs like that. But these seem to be much bigger in diameter. *Much* bigger."

I held up the bottle with the dead rat in silence, and he began to laugh hoarsely. When he managed to stop, he choked out, "Ellen-Sue really had a fit. That was running around our bedroom. I killed it, but

not before she had had hysterics."

"I bet she did," I said, "but so what, Motley? Most chicks don't make it big with rats."

"Rats?" he said in a funny way. "What rats? Oh, I see what you mean, old chap. My mistake too, at first. But it's not a rat, not a rat at all."

I waited, as patiently as I could, while he peered at the jar. "Look here," he said, pointing. "See those pointed teeth. No rodent or rat has those. Look at the feet. They're like tiny human hands. Some rats have furry tails, but none around here. I looked it up."

"So it's not a rat," I snapped. "Why not a, well, a possum or a, well, raccoon or something?"

"Very sharp, old boy, very sharp," he giggled at me. "As a matter of fact, a possum may well be what it is, or was. But if so, it's a sort of possum no human ever saw alive. Maybe a remote possum ancestor, but if the books are right, nothing like it has lived for many millions of years. How about a shot, old boy? Getting a bit dry, all this talking?"

I gave him a slug in his glass but kept tight hold of the bottle. Then I fed myself another. I was thinking. I was thinking about old movies. Movies like *King Kong*, *One Million, B.C.* and *The Lost World*. I was thinking about those fucking bones! "And the bones?" I said.

"I found them down the road a little way, one evening. It was after I'd sent a ham and some other stuff through, the biggest load I'd sent, as a matter of fact." He paused. "I suppose you can see they aren't very old. Not much older than the beef bones you'd find in a dump, say." He didn't elaborate on what had owned the bones in the first place. From the look on my face he didn't need to. I'm no scientist, but I have been to a museum or two in my life.

This was so big I got kind of numb all over for a minute or two. While I was deciding what to do next, I fed Motley another drink and walked over to look at his machine. It had, when I got close, a sort of homemade look about it. It could have been an experimental dishwasher or something. That meant nothing. Bell's first phone looked that way too. Two very thick armored cables led from it into a special plug in the wall, which I also looked at.

"It takes a lot of power for its size," said my host, who had followed me. "About four times the amount a big central air conditioner would, I've estimated. I had to have a special line put in. That took the last of my legacy," he added sadly. "But I don't need to have it on long, of course. Only a few minutes."

Something else stirred in my mind, something he'd said which

had grabbed my attention previously.

"Hey, wait a minute. You found that rat thing or whatever it is *alive* and in your bedroom, right? So I guess it got out of the machine. But what about those bones? What the hell, how could they be out in the road? You did say 'road,' didn't you?"

"Yes," he said, "I did. And that ancient pre-opossum didn't get out of the machine, either. It couldn't. There's a lug and a locking wheel on the door. Nothing could get out." Here, he was wrong, but not by much.

"The way I figure it," he went on, not forgetting to hold out his glass, "is something like this: when the Chronocron sends something back, it gets *replaced* in *our* time, and it gets replaced by something of the same exact mass. Say, ten pounds of coal gets sent back. OK, then ten pounds, no more, no less, of something, anything, alive or dead, comes out of the past. But there's a catch. And the catch is the time lag. Somehow it's uncertain, in a way I don't yet understand. Some replacements have never turned up here at all. They must have been dumped a ways off, maybe a long way. Maybe it's the earth's rotational spin. Maybe something else." He sunk back into his glass, mumbling about "Heisenberg" or someone.

My thoughts were still tripping over themselves, when a terrific bang hit the door. I almost jumped over the time machine, thinking some dinosaur (all right, I *said* it, finally) was coming home for lunch.

"Ah *heeah* you in theah, Mot-leeel!" came a voice like worn truck brakes. Southern, worn, truck brakes.

"You come out heeah, rait naaow, you stinkin', no good, runty, lickier-haid!" I won't do any more misspelled dialogue, but that's the sound. Mrs. Motley van D'Alliance III was home in force, and from the pitch in her screech, my precious ideas about dealing with her might need a bit of overhaul.

Motley was shrunk into a corner. So I put my finger to my mouth, then patted myself on the chest, to let him know I'd handle things. He looked grateful but also doubtful.

I slipped the bolt and ran up the door just in time to nearly get caught on the noggin with one of those heavy brown palm stems that littered the yard. It whanged past me and into the wall with impressive force.

Mrs. van D'Alliance seemed stunned at her near-miss or an unknown target, or maybe both. It gave me a second to look her over and figure out what to do about it.

I dunno what the first, or New-

port, Mrs. van D' had been like, but this was an item from the bottom of the list. Any list. "Used hard and put away wet," described her, in the classic words of an old pal in the horse-raising business.

She was a blobby, tightly corseted job, with orange-dyed hair, pulled up in one of those beehive things. She had purple lipstick and too much eye shadow on a pale washed-out face. A dirty green dress and wedgie-type shoes, plus cracked purple toenails, completed the picture. A semiretired hooker, recently drafted to the Tijuana League, would describe her.

"Who in hell are you and where's that lousy drunken Motley?" was her greeting. "I could smell that gin ten yards off and I know he's in there hiding behind his crazy, nut gadgets which cost *Keerrist* knows how much when I ain't got hardly money to eat on and"

I held up my hand in a solemn way and put on a look of sober dignity, something like some funeral parlor manager.

"Mrs. van D'Alliance," I said in a deep, vibrant voice, "your husband, Madam, has been doing very secret work for a long time." I lowered my voice. "There are things it is not safe for you to know, but I can tell you this much, anyway. Vast sums might possibly be involved, vast sums indeed. Your hus-

band has done some high-class inventing which may well interest people in high places, and people who don't welcome idle chatter."

Her mouth opened, but not in speech, just simple surprise.

"At this time, Madam, I am in the employ of the ATE. But I have worked for other agencies and may again, if you take my meaning?" If she wanted to think Amalgamated Tourist Enterprises was the CIA, that was her business. And my ultimate employers certainly disliked chatter about their business, idle or otherwise.

Motley had advanced behind me and now took on a little courage. He'd probably never seen his private hot-air outlet shut up before.

"You hear that, Ellen-Sue," he said, sticking out his shrunken chest, "Mr. Doakes and I were discussing finances, *big* finances. You've never understood my work, so let's hear no more of this. Mr. Doakes and I are going in town to dinner, eh, old chap? We may be discussing plans late into the night, so don't wait up." He had me in a corner, but I wasn't unhappy about it. I had things to do and I wanted him under my eye.

I handed her a card, which had my name, ATE, and a phony Park Avenue address on it, and smiled in a tight, restrained way.

"I'll take good care of old

Mot," I said. "We have much to discuss and I'll be at the XYZ Motel with him later on. But remember, please, no gossip, none at all. There are penalties, you understand?"

She could only nod, with her mouth still open. As we drove away, after locking the workshop very carefully, she was still standing in the drive next to the chewed-up '54 Plymouth, looking at my card. Motley was laughing and singing to himself. I'd given him back the whole bottle. Now, I *wanted* him drunk, dead drunk. By the time we reached the motel, after stopping for more booze, he was half gone. In another fifteen minutes he was totally gone and snoring unattractively on my couch. I loosened his grubby tie and went out to a public booth to do some long-distance phoning.

I got Barnstaffel on a very private line, only to be used in emergencies, and talked for a half-hour without a break. Then I listened for a minute, hung up and waited. Twenty minutes later, the phone rang and I did some more listening, but not to Barnstaffel. This was a voice I'd never heard before, but George Raft or Edward G. Robinson would have appreciated it. I especially disliked the ending, which went: "and if this is some kind of con or something, Doakes, you'll be the sickest sickie in the business!"

I tried to convey my true sincerity in my answer, and it was no acting.

I had dinner sent in from a nearby burger joint. It was for one, naturally. Then I watched television until bedtime and retired, after piling furniture in front of the door.

I needn't have bothered because Motley was still out cold, come the dawn. Breakfast was also sent in, but with it came some visitors.

One was Barnstaffel, as big as life and twice as repulsive. With him were two other guys, and if old B. B. made me sick, they just made me very nervous. They were dark, nattily dressed types in their thirties and they didn't say "dese" and "dose." They don't any longer. They were supposed to take orders from Barnstaffel, but he was very nervous about giving them any.

"Choe, my boy," he cried. "Where iss this famous discoverer?" I won't give you any more of his Katzenjammer dialect crap either, but that's the way he talked. I pointed to repulsive van D'Alliance on the couch and they all went over and peered at him. When he exhaled noisily, they moved back quickly.

"This scumbag invented something besides halitosis?" said the taller one. His name, I discovered, was Leo.

"He looks pretty terrible," I admitted. "But I'll be screwed if he

hasn't got something I don't understand, and I'm damned if I think anyone in the world but him does either."

"You may wish you was only getting screwed, Doakes, if this is a bust," said the short one. His name was Goldy, but don't ask me why. He had black hair.

"Now, now," said Bushveldt, "that's no nice way to talk. Joe finds something that looks good. He tells me and I tell — some other people. We both do our best. So let's go look at what this professor has to show us, eh?"

"OK," said Leo, "let's. But first let's get Lushwell here up on his feet. I want him along and someone's supposed to watch him anyway."

"Hell, I watched him all night," I answered. "All we have to do is comb that scruddy wife of his out of the way. Wait till you see *her*!"

"Wait till she sees *us*," said Goldy. Leo laughed in a hearty way and slapped him on the back.

The two of them simply undressed the guy and stuffed him into the shower, which they ran alternately boiling hot and ice cold for ten minutes, with the television turned up to muffle his screams. When they hauled him out, I thought he'd bought a coronary, but they knew what they were doing. He didn't know where, or what he was for a bit, but Barnstaf-

fel laid on his greasy charm over four cups of black coffee, and at the end of it, he was in something like human shape.

Next, they had him call in at West Dugong College and report himself sick. Then we poured ourselves into Bushveldt's big rented limo, and headed out to Palazzo van D'Alliance.

It looked even scummier at nine thirty a.m., and we pounded on the door for a while until it opened creakingly.

Madam van D' looked a hell of a lot worse than the estate. Her breath was as bad as Motley's, and I figured a mutual hobby had brought them together in the first place. Her eyes were bleary and she had on a once-orange housecoat that might have seen the laundry the previous fall. Her bare feet peeped shyly out from under the frazzled hem. The bags under her eyes were a deep beige, and with her ratty snarled hair, she was a figure to frighten a sadist bill collector.

Barnstaffel stepped forward, gut out, ready to take the lead, but his two anchormen knew better. Leo elbowed him gently out of the way and blocked him off.

"You this man's wife?" he said. He made 'wife' sound like 'accomplice.' "We need him on some top-secret work. You cleared by the government, lady?"

Once again, I watched fascinated, as the jaw dropped. Of course these boys had advantages I didn't. Like her hangover, for one. She was not pushed out of the way, she was *ignored* out of the way. It was kind of interesting to watch. We all went in to the Florida Room, which is what they call a messy room to watch TV and get blasted in, down on the Sunny Peninsula. This was as big a mess as one might dream up, replete with empty bottles, full ashtrays, and assorted bad smells, all distributed over a cracked terrazzo floor, and interrupted by broken pseudo-bamboo type furniture.

Barnstaffel had been conferring with his assistants, while I steered Motley and the helpmeet into chairs. Now he stuck out his chin and launched into his spiel.

"Professor and Mrs. van D'Alliance. We are here as representatives of high authorities. We ask, no, we command your silence, yes, and your co-operation. The professor may just have found a new principle. If so, enemies of our great country will try to get it. So, we frustrate them! We go away, all of us, with the professor's device and we build again *in secret*!" He hissed on "secret" and sounded pretty impressive, if you happen to dig old World War II movies with fat guys in S.S. uniforms doing the same act.

"We are all of us subject to the National Security Act," he thundered, one mottled paw resting on his sunken chest. "Its penalties are severe!" They were no where near as severe as the penalties Leo's and Goldy's employers dished out, but it seemed to make its point. Anyway, Mrs. van D'Alliance's toes began to twitch, and Motley looked up at the dirty windows like he was looking for bayonets or maybe rifle muzzles.

So help me, Bushveldt administers now the loyalty oath, or something like it, in the High Dutch he uses for English! Maybe they thought he was Henry Kissinger, who used to sound pretty similar. They were practically on their knees when he was through.

Next, we all went outside, having given Mrs. van D' time to dress, which did nothing to improve her. She was pretty well cowed, but I failed to analyze her recovery period.

Here, I got surprised, because pulled into the drive was an armored car of the Brinks variety, only larger. The organization did not waste time when it got interested!

We all piled in, Mrs. van D' protesting, but not very loudly, especially when Leo or Goldy looked at her. Before the rear door slammed, I could see a few neighbors gawking in surprise. I could

also note the open garage door, locks busted and hanging loose, which made *me* gawk in surprise.

The armored truck had comfortable seats clamped to the floor and even a heavy card table, likewise bolted down, with a good lamp anchored to the wall. Some set up!

"Before you should ask," said Leo, "his machine dingus got moved into another truck like this while we were inside. It's on the road ahead of us. And don't worry, Professor, we had it crated and padded like a baby's ass. It'll be in the same shape when we get where we're going."

"Where might that be?" I put in. "My gear and car are back at the motel, you may recall."

Goldy sighed wearily. "Doakes, your wheels and your junk are checked out and are on their way up north to your pad. Just relax, OK? We're *all* going on a trip and I don't know any more than you do. It's on a need-to-know basis, like in the spy books, see?"

"No one tells me this!" exploded Barnstaffel. "What about my office? What about my work?"

"Your work, chum, is doing what you're told."

"Suppose I don't want to go on no trip? And what about Motley's job at that chicken-shit college? It ain't much, but it's what we eat on. You gonna ship the college away, too?" Mrs. van D'Alliance had fi-

nally got her unpleasant voice back.

"Lady, I'm real glad you reminded me," said Leo. "Over on that table, you will all find pens and paper. So everybody just sit down and write nice letters, OK? Professor, you resign from your college. The rest of you write anyone else which might get itchy that you are off on a long vacation to the South Seas or somewhere. Any moms, dads, sisters, girlfriends, businesses, or anything. And don't seal the letters because I'm going to read them before they get mailed, dig?"

There was a long silence while we went on our separate thought paths. One thing was becoming most clear to yours truly. Leo and Goldy's employers, who at one remove were mine and Barnstaffel's also, were taking *no* chances, none at all. This time machine was so hot that no one who knew anything about it was going to be allowed out, except on a dog leash, if that! They had the whole pack of us wrapped up like salami, and Barnstaffel had been conned into thinking he was bossing things, when he was just more lunch meat like the rest of us.

Well, we all wrote letters. I had only one, to my landlord, telling him to keep the apartment open, that I'd be back in time and that a check for the rent would be along. Ellen-Sue wrote no one. Maybe she couldn't write. Motley's hand

shook so bad I had to help him with his, but West Dugong now had a new vacancy. Barnstaffel wrote at least ten, probably all to creditors. Leo read them all carefully and then sealed them and stuck them in his coat pocket. Then he settled down to relax with a paperback, which I observed to be Spengler's *Decline of the West*. Goldy was a reader, too, it turned out, but *Teenage Vice School* somehow looked less out of place. The rest of us just sat and listened to the tires, except for Motley, who fell asleep, breathing asthmatically into his shoulder.

Five hours later, by my clock, we stopped and the armored doors were opened onto a night sky, plus several shadowy figures. As we climbed out, I could see an identical truck parked next to us and figured the time machine must be in it.

We were on a flat piece of ground, with tufts of scrubby grass here and there and palm trees outlined against the stars some ways off. It looked like nowheresville and the mosquitoes began to bite hell out of me. Then I saw the plane. It was close behind us, a whopping big black shape against the sky, from the look of it, an old DC-4 prop job. This had to be one of the illegal Florida strips I was always hearing about, which funneled in dope, grass, and immigrants of the

non-kosher type. What had I succeeded in hornng myself into?

We were all herded, more or less gently, to the plane, and a door in the side opened, letting out light, while a row of steps clanked down. Up these we went and found ourselves in a big cabin made into a lounge, with sofas, chairs, and even a chrome bar with stools. As we entered in single file, I could hear grunting noises and thuds behind us, and I figured the machine was being wrestled into the cargo space. The plane door slammed and Leo dogged the locks shut.

Up front, next to the bar, a door opened and three men came through, from the direction of the pilot's cabin, and moved down the slanting deck. These old prop jobs sit up very nose-high. Then they stepped and looked at us.

The one on the left was a tall skinny guy with a bald head and horn-rimmed glasses, wearing a rumpled seersucker suit. Every so often the corner of his mouth twitched a little. On the right was a burly clown in a windbreaker and worn levis. He had on heavy boots and sported a badly broke nose, as well as two days' blue beard.

The one in the middle, though, was what held my attention. Because I knew him, and had for years. Lots of people knew him, including many assorted types in law enforcement.

He was still a bit round, but not so much as when we both attended P.S. 86 in a northern metropolis I shall not name. His name then was Salvatore Tomaselli, and we called him Sally Pasta, on account of his being unable to stop eating the stuff. He was the only kid I ever saw with both spaghetti *and* lasagna in his lunch box. Long since those childish days of yore, he had become upwardly maneuverable, via *el Sindicato*, where he became known as Sally Tomatoes, first as an enforcer, or soldier, then as a *capo*, and then as a very big area boss indeed. At this point, he made US Senate hearings with nonstop mutterings about "decline to answer on the grounds." He finally managed to get deported as an illegal immigrant, and unless my wires were crossed, he had no business being back in the States at all. It made me even chillier watching his beady black orbs and his pin-striped chubbiness, when I figured he probably wouldn't want it known he was here, let alone who he was in the first place.

"Greetings, chums," he said, in an oily way. "You can call me Mr. Saul. On my right is Professor Jones, a very brilliant man who has come to look over *your* machine, Dr. van D'Alliance," and he gave a nod to Motley, who just looked panicked. The tall guy twitched his mouth once and grunted, "Non-

sense. Farcical. Impossible.”

Sally ignored him and continued in his breezy rasp: “On my left, we have Mr. Williams, who is a construction and metals expert in the engineering line. He builds things, as you will see. Now let’s all have a drink. I’ll tend bar and we can sit down and get better acquainted, eh?”

Motley and his bride were numbers one and two in line, and I was last, except for Leo and Goldy. They were *always* last from now on, remaining poised behind our backs for reasons which I had no doubt of.

When I got to the bar I had my head down, and since Motley was already behind me for seconds, I hoped I would pass unnoticed. No such luck. Sally hadn’t gotten to his present altitude by missing much. As I turned quickly away with my double Scotch, his hand clamped on my arm.

“I know you!” came the rasp, but with all the fake jollity evaporated.

“OK, it’s a cop,” I said feebly. “Long time since P.S. 86, eh, — Mr. Saul?”

He glared at me for a minute, then relaxed. “Well, well,” he smirked. “Old Joe Doakes, the class cut-up. You ain’t no Fed, that’s for sure.” His voice lowered to a whisper. “See that it stays Mr. Saul, Doakes, if you want to stay

healthy.” Then he raised his voice to normal. “Remember when we blew up the crapper, with old lady Melchick sitting on it? Christ, what a laugh! Ah, them were the days!”

I laughed hollowly, having been home sick the day poor Miss Melchick was taken to the hospital after this merry jest, with two quarts of lye burning off her epidermis.

“Well, folks,” went on Sally, looking at his watch, “it’s nice to find an old buddy amongst you. But we can rework the past on other occasions. Now, let me explain loud and clear what comes next. And no dumb questions until I finish, see!” Aside from gulping and slurping noises, the cabin went dead quiet.

“In a few moments, we will all take off and fly to a tropical retreat of my acquaintance, where we will all live in luxury. *If* everyone co-operates, that is!

“While there,” he went on, “my colleagues will appraise and report on the van D’Alliance invention. *If* the report is favorable, there is going to be lots of money. Lots and lots of money, in fact more money than any of you ever thought about. There will also be lots of security, hence present arrangements, right? No one talks, nobody writes, nobody goes for unauthorized walks or swims or boat rides. And if they do, or try to, they get to be

very, very sorry." He looked hard at all of us and still not a soul spoke.

"Good," he said, smiling again, like a chubby rattlesnake. "Now let's all have another slug and relax. Think of all that dough that's coming, which will be paid, I may say, into nice numbered bank accounts, which I will open for you in sunny Switzerland, right?"

The motors roared suddenly and in a short while we were bumped aloft and growling our way through the Florida night, destination Shangri-La, for all I knew.

Barnstafel finally found his voice and, true to form, asked a stupid leading question.

"Ahem, Mr. Saul, I'm just maybe a little bit puzzled about something. I'm no scientist or engineer, and neither is Joe. What do we do on these operations? What do you need *us* for?" I felt the old chill as two nasty black eyes looked us over. If the answers came out "nothing," then Bushveldt and I had a good chance to start a sky-diving course in a hurry, minus parachutes!

After a pause that seemed to last several decades, Sally took a drink, then leaned over.

"You know hotels, motels, stuff like that, don't you, Barnstafel? I mean how they should look, how they should be run, right? Catering, first-class service, all that jazz?" Bushveldt gulped and nodded vio-

lently. He'd just made the same equation I had, only much later. If he'd been asked to be a ballet expert, he'd have nodded. Which left me, feeling very lonely.

"Look at those two crumbum luses put it away," marveled Sally, staring past me to where Motley and the Mrs. were knocking back their fifth or sixth jolts. "My best booze too. Ah, the hell with it. Now listen, Doakes," he said, turning to me, "forget the old school shit. You mean one thing to me and one only. If that alky has really got what you claim he has, you get a free ride, plus all the dough you ever dreamed of. But I want him *working*. I mean, happy, but in condition to put out in the brain waves. He can get juiced on his own time, so long as he works his ass off when he's needed, see. That means you! You see he stays healthy and in his mental right mind when he's needed, and that woman of his, too. But keep her out of my hair and sight. Jeez, how could anyone get in the sack with that? No wonder he's a lush. You get my picture?"

"Roger and out, Sally — I mean Mr. Saul."

He scowled at the slip, then relaxed and even smiled. "So call me Sally. I get tired of being called Boss all the time, you know? Nice to have someone around that knew me back when, once in a while. Say remember the time"

I gave eager grunts of approval to an endless stream of Sally's happy memories, ranging from cats incinerated in gasoline to dumping elderly pushcart vendors down open manholes. Eventually he ran dry and excused himself for some sack time. We all flaked out on chairs and lounges and I even managed to fall asleep to the roar of the engines.

Some six hours later I woke up as we landed again. But Leo informed us all it was a fuel stop, and no doors were opened. Out of the window I could see a pink dawn, a few palm trees and also a lot of sand. We could have been in the central Sahara, for all I could guess, though this seemed a bit unlikely from my estimate of our speed. As I tried to look further, Leo and Goldy went around and flicked all the shades down in an obvious way. "No peeking," said Goldy, patting my bald spot. "Daddy doesn't like that." I got the message and fell asleep again.

When I woke next, we were lumbering down once more and landing for the second time. This time my watch said noon. And there was Sally standing in the door to the front section, all neat, shaved and spruced up, which none of us certainly were.

"OK, folks," he said as we all unglued ourselves and got the sticky out of our eyes, "here we are

in a great little place. It's a very private island the Rockefellers ain't got around to buying yet. Don't ask the name or location, because you won't get told and I will get very annoyed if I hear about it, which I will. Just think about all the sweet money at the end, eh? So now let's go and see the sights."

At the end of a long, hot day, what we had seen was this: A hot, low, squatty island covered with thorny brush and drooping palm trees, some of which had coconuts on them. Some big concrete buildings, like airplane hangars, but lower. These had trees all around and growing on the roofs, too, a pretty good camouflage gimmick. From a distance they looked like low hills. A big white house, and I mean *big*, with about fifty rooms, like a small hotel, with a pool and a fancy garden. A lot of bare, sharp, rock coast without even one beach, plus a lot of coral reefs just offshore. One very small harbor with some large cabin cruisers in it, entirely surrounded by tall wire fencing and a guarded gate. And a lot of peons in white clothes, jabbering in some language which might possibly have been Spanish. They, it turned out, were the help.

We saw all of this because Leo and Goldy drove the van D's, Barnstaffel and me all around the island. We were *meant* to see it, Leo

informed us, so that any silly ideas about leaving would be henceforward just that — silly ideas. We were told the island was around six miles long and two wide and that it was the property of a nutty hermit, a Swede millionaire, who never had any visitors. I believed the last part, but strongly suspected the Swede millionaire to be the collective label of a group of gentlemen who had once met at Appalachian, N.Y., to divvy up the U. S. A.

Anyway, by late evening we were back at the big house, well wine and dined, in clean clothes, and ready for the morrow's business. I retired with a head full of thoughts, none of which were pleasant.

From the next day's breakfast coffee, life took on a fast tempo indeed. The schedule went something like this: Motley and his twitchy corpse of a fellow scientist disappeared into a back office to argue all day with each other and also Williams the construction type. Mrs. van D' slept hangover late, which was nice for the rest of us. Leo, Goldy and I played gin or fished or swam or read (there was even a large-sized library). I took a terrible beating at gin, and at a buck a point, it really hurt. Leo explained we were gambling on future wealth and that markers were fine, but it still made me nervous. Bushveldt Barnstafel was very busy,

however, and scuttled around all day checking blueprints and lists of various things, which he refused to let me see, for some stupid reason. Sally flew in and out to check on things, and after a while a lot of things were available to be checked on.

The only work I had, and it got pretty draggy, was watching Motley's level of booze intake, which started at five thirty over cocktails. I stayed with him all evening, which was a big bore, then searched both him and his room for stashed-away samples, then locked him up for the night. Mrs. van D' had a separate room, which suited both of them, and got sloshed totally and regularly. Nobody gave a fiddler's fart about her, anyway. I soon learned what Motley could handle and still do his head work on the next day. So it got into a dull routine. The funny thing was, it became obvious that the other professor, whose alias was Jones and whom I suspected strongly of being a closet junkie, had changed his way of thinking about old Motley. He called him "Doctor" with real respect, even when Motley was boiled as an owl come sundown.

Two dirty freighters with Panama flags appeared off the minute harbor and began to unload lots of stuff onto flat barges they brought with them. The first thing that came off the barges was a

bunch of mean-looking bastards who made Texas oil riggers look like ladies' maids. These, in turn, began to bring in and unload tons of construction stuff, like cranes, bulldozers, cement, steel beams, heavy lumber, and God knows what all. These rough types built their own camp on the other end of the island, and we never saw them except at loading and unloading, which got pretty frequent. But a hell 'of a lot of building was going on somewhere back in the island, and Mr. "alias Williams" was always roaring around in hardhat and a jeep. One time they unloaded a monster generator that could have powered New York, or at least Staten Island. Another, it was tons of new furniture in crates and also swimming-pool loads of paint. This cargo and also the tons of assorted crockery were of special interest to Bushveldt, who went away with them into the backcountry looking smugger and stupider than usual.

For me, life went on like a crazy dream, being really bad only after Ellen-Sue got tired of propositioning Leo and Goldy and turned her efforts on me. I decided I would drown myself the day she began to look halfway acceptable. Meanwhile the peons buzzed about, serving as help, gardeners, and what all. And I continued to lose at gin, which might have been bad luck.

After three months of this

weird, but no-so-bad existence, all at once the shit hit the fan.

Sally appeared unexpectedly at dinner one evening and announced we were all going on a little drive later in the night. I only hoped the drive would not end with free catering for the island's large population of sharks, which I had many opportunities to eyeball whilst fishing for nicer things. But he even took time to pat me on the back and tell me I'd been doing a great job on Motley. I felt confused, but this was nothing new.

So after the food, terminated by good brandy and better coffee as usual, we all crammed into a parade of jeeps and drove off in a cloud of bugs. One thing no one had been able to do was kill the hundred billion local mosquitoes, or even discourage them slightly. And they were a very greedy kind, which I can rate, being a sometime resident of south Jersey.

After fifteen minutes of swatting mosquitoes or spitting them out, a blaze of light appeared ahead of us, and we zipped down a tunnel on a concrete ramp into the underground, while enormous steel doors clanged shut behind us. We came to a stop in a huge cave with concrete all about us and lights like kliegs overhead. But none of us were looking at lights.

In front of us, in the middle of this king-sized air-raid shelter, sat

an oversized version of Motley's steel box. Where his had been maybe six feet high, this job was fifty if it was an inch. The round door was three feet thick, as well as being open, and inside you could put perhaps two school busses and a possible four cars as well. The biggest cables I ever saw, like a foot thick, ran out of it and into steel plates on the wall. Now I knew what that mother of a generator was for.

Sally lines us all up and, so help me, picked up an electric bullhorn, like they use on boats.

"OK," he boomed, while the gray walls echoed, "I'm going to let you in on a little secret. We here are not *really* government men. In fact, this whole deal is strictly free enterprise."

I smiled sourly to myself. Even Motley and Ellen-Sue had figured *that* out a long time ago.

"What we have here," he went on, "due to many talents present, but chiefly Professor van D'Alliance," and he gave him a big wave, "is a thing which will enable many persons which like privacy to have it, free from care and types who want to prosecute, I mean to *persecute* them." He covered this slight error of the tongue quickly and went on.

"This here time gimmick means anyone with access to the right ticket can go into the past and *disappear!*" He looked solemn, as if at

a buddy's funeral, many of which he had no doubt both attended and arranged as well. At this point I noticed "Jones" and "Williams" had appeared behind us. Leo and Goldy had never left, as usual.

"With my chum, Mr. Barnstafel here," he continued, as Bushveldt beamed, "I have designed a luxurious hotel *in the past*, friends, like many millions of years ago. All comforts are there or rather will be provided, at cost or maybe just a teensy bit higher." Like eight million percent higher, said the Doakes brain.

"We haven't actually built anything yet, but the planning is all done, the materials are here ready to go. We are going to run a few tests first, and then we're all set. Now, I will let that great genius who concepted the whole scene, brain-wise, explain what we've done and what comes next. Professor van D'Alliance?" He now starts clapping, as so, of course, does everyone else.

Motley looked much the same as when I first met him, which was scared, although a little cleaner and with a shave. But he ambled forward and borrowed the bullhorn with a feeble grin.

"Well," he said, "the van D'Alliance Chronocron, or time shuttle, is here in front of you all. And it works. We have been able to get to certain points in the past on re-

peated occasions, that is the *same* points, which is vital. These points all fall within a period of about eighty-five to two hundred million years ago, give or take a few. There have been many problems to overcome. Professor, er, Jones and I have found certain, well, anomalies which we simply cannot resolve, in some cases. For instance, why are we limited to this one segment of time? Why can we go neither beyond it or closer to the present? We don't know, but Krug's recent work on magnetic fluxes may well" Here a loud rasping cough from Sally shut him up. No Krug fluxes need apply. Stick to business!

"Ah, yes, well," he went on, "then we had to find ways of probing *what* the shuttle emerged into. Obviously coming out into solid rock, earth or even underwater, would not only be useless but highly dangerous as well. But that problem we solved also, and we can safely predict that the shuttle will only exit safely onto dry land and in the same place, always, if the proper controls are used." He looked down at the floor before going on, and, I realized late, he must have been summoning up his small supply of nerve to go on, because what he said next took some guts. His voice suddenly got louder.

"I am *not* satisfied with the matter displacement problem, how-

ever. Large and unpredictable objects may reappear anywhere on this globe, since the larger the mass sent back, the further the point of rediffusion into the present seems to occur. What I mean is" But Sally had now grabbed the bullhorn back, having finally got the idea that he was not listening to a hymn of thanksgiving any longer. He shoved Motley away in a sweeping motion and the poor bastard's one feeble attempt to be honest was over.

"So like the professor said, folks," Sally resumed, "practically all the problems been worked out. And, now, the volunteers which has been named to take a first look at our future site will be given their equipment and sent back into the past to survey around the site of the lovely retreat we will build!"

Two guys appeared from through a side door, pushing a dolly loaded with sun helmets, rifles, khaki clothes, and other gear of the Tarzan-epic variety, but I hardly gave them a glance, because I was looking around for the volunteers.

And found everyone looking at me. Or rather at me and Bushveldt Barnstaffel. Meet the "volunteers." I thought of those rotting bones that Motley had found in his driveway and shuddered.

Bushveldt was blubbing helplessly about hotels and how he was

needed to run and plan them, but meanwhile he was being dressed, forcibly, by the dolly crew and other rough types who had filed in behind us. They advanced on me, too, but I glared and pushed my way through them. I'm no hero, but I was fucked if I'd be dressed up like a baby.

I was interrupted by a wild howling noise and looked up to see two amazon bull-dyke types appearing to seize Ellen-Sue and dress *her* as well. I looked over at Motley and now found him grinning broadly. He must have made his own deal, the little rat. So much for his courage, the scummy creep. She was a mess, but nobody sends a woman, let alone a wife, into something like this. Then I got another surprise.

"Look, boss," said Leo, stepping forward, "this is a test, right? Now Doakes here is the only one with half an ounce of guts or brains either. They could all three fall down a hole and you wouldn't learn nothing. For a small bonus, me and Goldy will go along and ride shotgun, right, Goldy?" I felt kind of flattered, I must say.

Goldy looked surprised and not very pleased, either, but he was used to following Leo's lead and grunted an assent.

Sally was really surprised because professional hoods don't volunteer any more than career army sergeants, but Leo led him aside,

and after a spirited discussion in whispers, he agreed. The discussion must have been about the size of the bonus.

Ellen-Sue finally stopped yelling and got dressed the same as us four, in long-sleeved khaki shirts and long pants, with high boots and sun helmets. Sally took one look at her face and told Leo the guns would be given only to him and Goldy, until *after* we were through the machine and out the other side. But she managed to get close to her helpmeet and spit in his face. No one tried to stop her. Barnstaffel was dead-white and muttering in Dutch.

We all got into the big lighted chamber, and the enormous round port slammed shut behind us. We could hear all the lugs and clamps being applied, and then there was a silence as we all looked at each other. It lasted maybe a minute and then there came a deep soft humming, more like a vibration that went all through us, as if we were inside some whopper of a microwave oven. It didn't actually hurt, but your skin pringled all over, the way static electricity makes it.

This went on for a bit and I moved over to look at the heap of weapons, more to stop thinking than anything else. I was glad to see an old friend, an M-1 Garand from World War II days, which I could still handle, I thought. There was

also a bazooka and a lot of big shells for it, plus two .45 automatics and a .38 police-type revolver; also a couple of army auto-load shotguns and buckshot shells for them. At least we wouldn't be completely defenseless, which was some comfort. We divvied them up and I got a .45 and the Garand .30 rifle. Ellen-Sue got a revolver and oddly enough could handle it. Watching her spin the cylinder, I wondered what her background had been. Goldy took the bazooka and Leo a .45 and one shotgun. Bushveldt got the other, but his hand trembled so, I made a vow to stick well back behind his fat butt.

The humming vibration finally died away, and Leo, who seemed to know all about it, moved to the opposite end of the chamber from where we had come in. There was an identical door, but all the huge lugs and locking bars were on the inside, *our* side. This made practical sense, because this way nothing could get back through and out the way we had come in. In theory, that is.

Leo positioned Goldy in the center, Ellen-Sue behind him, his bazooka aimed at the port, with Barnstafel on one side and me on the other, also aiming. Then he began to free the bars, one by one, until all were dogged open. He looked around to see we were in line and pushed hard against the great

steel circle, which opened slowly outward. Then he jumped back to one side.

A blaze of red light poured in; along with a gush of warm tropical air. We heard a crowing sound, like a rooster but much larger, in the distance. A thing like a huge oversized wasp, buzzed past the opening. We were looking into a sunset and down to a long sloping beach, with the blue sea lapping gently on it, about a hundred yards away. Strange pungent smells came in through the opening, the sea mixed with plant odors that really tickled the nose. The crowing thing let go again in the distance, but nothing moved in the circle of light.

"OK," said Leo, peering around the door, "here's how it goes. Doakes, Barnstafel and me go out first. Goldy, as back-up, you stay within ten feet of the door. Ellen-Sue, you stay with him. We'll go maybe a hundred feet, no more, and look around; then I'll have some idea what to do next. And listen, you," he added to Bushveldt, "if that shotgun goes off aimed at one of us, I'm going to personally blow your lard-ass off, see!"

We moved slowly out, stepping over the high rim of the port, and, once we were twenty feet outside, took a look around and back.

The big box now sat on level ground above the quiet sea, crushing down an acre of low, knee-high

palmettos or something. Bigger palms, with fat trunks, loomed in the background and, beyond them, much taller trees still, but with pointed stems like pine trees and deep shadows under them. I did not really like the shadows and decided to keep an eye peeled to the rear. Bugs of all kinds buzzed around us, but nothing tried to bite us. I guess we smelled wrong to bugs which had never tasted a human before. There was a nice breeze moving down through the trees, but it was very quiet in a funny way, and I finally figured out why. There were no birds singing. Jeez, pre-bird world! Somehow this hit me harder than anything else to date!

"This is supposed to be an island, about the same size as the one we left," said Leo to me. "It isn't in the exact same place, though, according to the eggheads, and I don't think they know why, any more than I do. Jones thinks it may be in the South Pacific or what was the South Pacific way back then. Anyway, it's supposed to be as safe as anything around in this period. So let's push a little further away and see the sights. Stay well away from the water, though. They told me that much."

The sea looked the safest place around to me, barring running back into the time shuttle, but if that was the word, then I would not venture to argue.

We went real slow, angling down the slope to the left, so we stayed midway between the sand of the beach and the higher stuff further up. And I noticed something else funny. This was a green, humid, tropical set-up that could have used Dorothy Lamour to advantage, but it was all green, or greeny-yellow. There was no other color, no flowers of any kind, any more than there were birds! Underfoot, there was just scrub or nothing, except some moss in the shady bits. But no grass of any kind. What a nutty place!

About a hundred yards from the shuttle entrance, trouble appeared. In front of us was a kind of shallow gully, choked with taller brush, which led down direct to the sea through a little rocky gulch. I could hear water trickling down from up to the left, but it was only visible at the sea edge where a little stream ran over some shallow rocks.

There was a cracking noise of trampled brush and out of the gully came a head. The mud-colored head had a big turtle beak and a huge horn like a rhino's, but much bigger and straighter. Behind the horn were two yellow eyes and a skull flaring back into a rim of black spikes two feet long, pointing up and rearwards. The whole skull apparatus was perhaps six feet wide.

The yellow eyes looked us over and decided to vote "no." There was a grunt, and two really gross front legs and a notched back, like a large hippo's in size, began to come up out of the gully. How in hell it was hidden in the first place, I don't know, unless it was asleep and lying down.

"Run," yelled Leo, unnecessarily, while loosing off a blast of buckshot at the head. He might as well have blown a soda straw, for all the impression it made. The whole enormous body had heaved up now, and it was bigger than any elephant, with a long, heavy tail to match.

I was running my ass off toward the shuttle, and Barnstaffel was too. Leo, who was lighter and younger, plus in better shape, soon caught up and led the way. Ahead, I could see Goldy pointing the bazooka at my face, and I gave him A-plus for guts, as well as praying he knew how to aim. Personally, I'd have slammed the door on what was grunting and lumbering along behind us.

I sneaked a quick peek back and was appalled. The thing could make better time smashing through the scrub than we could, and that chomping beak was only twenty feet behind my tail! I let out a yowl and proceeded to trip on a flat palmetto trunk, falling down smooch on my face. With my mouth full of

scratchy brush, I froze, not even thinking "this is the end."

Goldy kept his nerve, God bless him, and that bazooka sent one shell zipping over my back from about forty feet in front. There was a Christ-almighty bang and a shower of sloppy wet things fell on me. I scrambled up and looked back.

The bazooka was designed for knocking out tanks, but it had effectively removed most of the beaked head in front of the shoulders. Only fragments remained, both red meat and shattered white bone, and blood was spraying all over the place in fountains. We watched, all of us stupefied, because the whole colossal hulk was still staggering around, tearing up the ground in chunks, while gobs of raw flesh splattered all around us.

Then it tripped, and as we stood petrified into position, the headless dinosaur rolled and tumbled down the slope and went over and over the sand into the calm water of the sea with a twenty-ton splash, leaving a trail of blood and shredded unmentionables in its rear.

It thrashed feebly in the shallows, the gushing red stain coloring the water around it, and then rolled into deeper water, where it floated upside down, but still kicking. Not for long, however.

Out of the sea came a head like a huge snake, but with long needle

fangs on the jaws. This was on a neck like a giraffe, only twice as long, and two more joined in. They began to tear the headless one in chunks, and we could see the huge tan bodies and flippers that went with the necks, while they fought and battered at the dying dinosaur, plus each other as well.

Suddenly, all three tried to leave, paddling desperately away and sending bloody waves washing way up the beach. Two of them made it, but the third suddenly rose out of the water held by a shark head that must have been ten feet wide, which promptly bit the giant body in half! The bitten things screamed so our ears hurt.

More showers appeared of blood and meat, more snapping and grinding and more red, foaming waves poured ashore. By this time we had all backed into the time shuttle, without even noticing what we were doing.

Still watching this incredible scene in the water, Leo pulled shut the big port and with shaky hands, set the locking bars, and dogged them shut. Silence now fell, broken first by friend Goldy.

"This is going to be a *resort*?" he said, rather in a mild way, I thought.

"I declare," said Ellen-Sue, carefully checking out her revolver, "I think I'm gonna have a few words to say to Motley and that

dirty stinkin' Mr. Saul, sendin' a lady off to a place like a crazy zoo with no cages!"

Goldy reached over nimbly and whipped the gun out of her mitts. "You got a point there, lady," he admitted, "but I think Leo and me will keep the artillery while we go back to normal. Ante up, boys."

I'd forgotten I was clutching the unfired M-1 to my bloody breast. Looking down, I almost blew my dinner. I was sticky-tight with lizard gore and a few bits of solidier gorp mixed in for effect. And the smell! I handed over my unused arsenal and so did Bushveldt. He was *still* mumbling in High Dutch.

"If you're hungry, baby, try my shirt," I told him.

He took a good look at it and went over and was violently sick in a far corner, which almost made it all worth it. When I turned around, Goldy started gagging. The back, it appeared, was much worse and I was glad I couldn't see it. Leo shook his head at me in a reproving way, but he was grinning, if wolves can grin.

Then we sat in the quiet of the big box for sometime, and I began to wonder if we were going to stay there permanently. Leo did his usual mind-reading act.

"Relax, everybody. This thing is *timed*. We were supposed to go back in one hour, and we are almost at it."

Sure enough, in a minute or so, the weird humming started again, and we could feel that strange tingling all through our bodies.

Eventually it stopped again, and we could hear the catches being freed on the other side of the original entry port.

When they opened we looked into the muzzles of two more bazookas, plus some assorted machine guns and a rifle or two, all of which slowly dropped as it sank in we had brought back no after-dinner guests.

Then Sally pushed up to the front and looked at us, and with him were Jones, Motley, and a guy in a white coat with a black bag. All their jaws sunk when they saw us, especially me, with my new re-encrusted suit.

"It's a little like hairy back there, boss," said Leo from behind me. "But we're all OK, thanks to Goldy and that tank buster of his." He slapped Goldy on the back. "They all behaved real good, but we need to have a little talk before anybody else gets sent back. Some very special equipment ought to go first, is what I mean." He paused as if searching for what to say next. Then it came.

"Maybe we could get a loan from the Second Armored at Fort Hood or somewhere?"

II

It turned out the guy in the white coat *was* a doctor after all. Maybe an unfrocked abortionist or something, but he ran us through all kinds of tests, blood and otherwise, and we were even kept locked up until the tests were all over. I joked with the others about being astronauts, but sobered up when Ellen-Sue, of all people, pointed out we had been a hell of a lot further away than any of the space jockeys.

Actually, when some of the implications began to sink in, they scared the piss out of me. Suppose we had brought back some disease or bug that didn't exist now? Compared to the precautions the United States takes over returning astronauts, what we went through was kindergarten stuff. We could have infected the whole island the minute we got out of the box!

I mentioned this to Leo over cards and he shrugged. "Yeah, I thought of that, too. But the doc says that the bugs back then were much too primitive to hurt us. Only a ninety-nine percent chance, he says."

One percent, I thought to myself and flinched.

Well, we finished the tests, but more unnamed experts of various kinds quizzed us. One showed us pictures of various dinosaurs, each worse than the one before. And,

sure enough, we spotted old Nose-horn right off. His name was *Monocolonius* (I wrote it down), and the three long-necked paddle-foot jobs were called plesiosaurs. The shark was only a shark, merely four times bigger than the biggest which nibble on you nowadays. This all got the guy with the book very excited and he squared off with twitchy Jones, who was also present.

"It can't be an island!" he squeaked at Jones. "It is totally impossible, due to weight, especially skull weight, for an animal like this" (which was Nose-horn) "to swim very far, that is if they could swim at all."

All this crap led to a long egg-head argument and they went out together, still gabbling like geese and hand waving. It was amazing how much crazy talent Sally could lay his hands on, I often thought.

Eventually, after we had all been questioned to death, they let us out and alone, while the former routine began again. I found it very restful, personally. Fighting dinosaurs may look like fun in the flicks, but one hour would last me forever.

Meanwhile, equipment was still being landed and sent inland. A lot of it made more sense, after what we had been through. One night I heard a lot of clanking and engines and looked out the windows. There

was a bunch of square tank-like things going by in the moonlight. Where a tank's turret should be was a shield with a long, thin, skinny gun, looking much too small for the body, sitting up on a mount with a hole for the driver or gunner behind it. My knowledge of United States hardware was World War II vintage, and these were new to me.

"Multipurpose ONTOS," purred Leo from behind me, making me jump. He had drifted in from his own pad. "They're like tanks, but amphibious and also troop carriers. And that gun doohickey, is a recoilless rifle. It shoots small shells, like a bazooka, but bigger and ten times as far.

"So they still think they can handle that bunch of monsters, eh?"

"Hell, Doakes, they could probably get an atom bomb if they needed to. You think with all the leftover junk from thirty wars floating around, the boss can't take care of some oversized lizards?" He laughed and went away again, leaving me leaning on my elbow until the motor noise died away.

Two other new things were of note in our lives. A bulletin board appeared with no advance notice, in the big main lounge, and on it every day were clipped bits from newspapers, mostly American, but English too, and sometimes German or French, which I don't read.

There were pictures in lots of them. One week's reading was enough to tell the main story. We were rumbled, that is, up to a point.

Like a shower of mud, mixed with green logs, crushed a house in England. Two people were killed. The logs were from fossil trees, only they were fresh.

Or 60 tons of sea water washed away an oil rig. Not an offshore oil rig, but one planted in central Canada. When the mess was cleared away, a lot of fish, ripe and stinking, were found which should not have been anything but skeletons in very old rock indeed.

The one that broke Sally up made me want to vomit, as well as killing him with a dull knife. I've conned people in a mild way all my life, but this was murder. He was giggling over it when I came through the hall, and he waved me over to share the fun. Anything that made him laugh should have been a good enough stop sign.

A ten-foot high, meat-eating dinosaur had appeared in an Indonesian school yard during recess. It ate two kids and killed twelve others and a teacher before the local army arrived with artillery.

"This will really keep everybody hopping," he chuckled. "They won't have no time to think about us, baby, none at all." If I'd had the guts, I'd have strangled him on the spot.

There was other news relating to Sally Tomatoes and Friends, Limited. The United Nations had secret security sessions going, and a world-wide alert was on. The United States, China and Russia, for once, all decided they were all under attack, and even the Arabs and Israel agreed it was neither of *them*. Castro sent offers of help to everybody, and teams of top scientists were meeting hourly. I had reached such a point of sickness, I almost hoped they would find us and wipe us out with a hydrogen bomb. But Sally had been clever, or someone had. The slant from the papers was that the world was being attacked by mad scientists from outer space! Or from the ancient past or somewhere. Nutty religious groups formed all over, ranging from end-of-the-world idiots to eco-freaks, who said the planet was striking back at polluters and had a giant brain down in its center core! Try to sell anyone on a Syndicate operation and you would have been sent to the nearest funny farm in a jacket laced up the back. All I could do was try and avoid Sally and his laughter, but I was getting less and less sleep. Motley was boozing more and more now, and I let him, but no one seemed to give a damn. They'd sucked him dry by now.

I have mentioned that a couple of things happened about this time.

The other one was a pleasant surprise. Ellen-Sue began to pick up her socks.

First, I noticed that her hair dye was faded out and that she was neater. She held herself to one drink before chow and began to go swimming and even fishing with us. The bags disappeared from under her eyes and she got a nice tan, mixed with a lot of freckles. What appeared finally was a snappy-looking woman in the early forties, with brown hair (OK, so a *little* gray) and a cute figure for her age. She was no Raquel Welch, but she was no pig either.

She quit making drunken passes at anything in pants and was nice and polite. I dunno where her education stopped, but she was no dumb-head, and once I got used to her hog-and-hominy accent, she was fun to talk to. I found myself drifting her way more and more and even tried a pass after a good dinner one night. I got chilled off but quick, but not nasty, either, you know? Just, "You're a nice guy, but nothing doing; let's stay friends." I began to look at her harder and harder. The Hour of the Dinosaur had really brought on a change, and I *don't* mean change of life, either.

To Motley, she was Miss Frost. She looked right through him when he spoke to her, and after a bit he quit trying. He was so ginned up

now anyway, I doubt if much really penetrated. He spent most of the day out under a tree, either passed out, bottle in paw or working on it.

Ellen-Sue and I found we felt the same way about the horror show on the bulletin board. She let me know that this was what had snapped her out of the scummy life she'd been rolling around in and that she felt slow burning was too good for Sally Tomatoes and his buddies. But wrack our brains as we tried, there seemed nothing we could do.

Meanwhile, the mountains of supplies and building stuff were still unloaded at night and trucked inland; the small army of servants and serfs still padded around mowing lawns, serving food and booze and doing tons of laundry.

A funny thing happened one evening in connection with these guys though. I heard low voices down near a little beach when I was out walking, and it sounded like the native secret code which I had figured out to be two parts Aztec, or something, and one part bad Spanish. I would have paid no attention, but the voices stopped and a man swung up the slope and passed me in the dark. I was standing still and he never noticed me at all, but I'll be damned if it wasn't Goldy. What was that illiterate slob doing talking the weird native lingo and being so secret about it too? I decided to

say nothing and keep an eye on him.

A few days later, just in case we were all getting too restless or bored, Sally staged another little show. This time it was bingo night, Godfather style, and we all got numbered certificates of deposit in Swiss banks plus keys to open them. I thought they must be counterfeit, but they looked real enough. I had always assumed he was going to knock us all off whenever our use was over, but if these things were real, maybe he felt some gratitude. I didn't like to ask how much was involved, but he told us anyway, with no prompting. I almost fainted because my share was a hundred grand and so was Ellen-Sue's. We all looked stunned and this gave him a big boot.

"You people never exactly seen what we got here, with the professor's little machine," he confided, while pulling on a foot-long Cuban cigar.

"Look, how many guys in the world need to cool off once in a while? Not just in the rackets, but South American generals and like that? OK, so the U.N. and Interpol and all the various law people with computers can make it pretty hairy these days, see? But one place they *can't* go is back in time. So, my friends and I, which financed this whole operation, we sell shares. You can't *buy* anything permanent,

but you can lease space. And nobody without lots of the folding gets in. Everybody gets checked out first, and then they get assessed on two counts, one being what they are good for finance-wise, and second the degree of heat which is on them. Then we figure a scale for that person and back they will go, safe and sound. Neat, huh?"

"Plus a few million people get killed as a fringe benefit," I couldn't help putting in.

"So what are you, Doakes, Mr. Sunday School?" He gave me a dirty look, then laughed. "Maybe when *you* went back, half a big lizard head came up front and helped eat someone here. So you ain't no rose either. We're all in it together, folks, and that's why you ain't going to turn down that lovely money, right?"

He was right and I felt sick at my stomach. That night I lay awake, staring at the wall and wishing I could make a volcano blow up this rotten business and the whole scumbag crowd, including myself. What had once seemed merely a bad joke was now so filthy sick and nauseating that I now hated my own face in the bathroom mirror.

Suddenly, I heard a faint knock at my bedroom door. When it came a second time, I slid over and eased it open a crack. I could see Ellen-Sue's face and I felt better all at

once. Maybe a little female comfort was just what I needed.

But when I let her in I got a surprise. She was wearing the same long dress she had on at dinner and behind her in came Leo, in his dark suit, which made me flinch, naturally.

"Be quiet, Joseph," she hissed, closing the door and locking it. "We got to talk to you. Leo here has somethin' to tell you that's mighty important!"

Leo checked the window and closed it, lowering the screens. Then he moved over and pulled my hand away from the light switch I was about to turn on.

"No lights, Doakes. I've checked your room and Ellen-Sue's already. They've been bugged all along, but only with twenty-four hour tapes. That means no one checks them but once a day, understand? And I'm the one who does it. So we're in the clear on that point." His voice had changed, being now very clear and with no mistakes in English. And he was somehow on a first-name basis with Ellen-Sue, which annoyed me a bit. I sat down on the bed and looked at his tall shadow in the dark.

"I have to trust someone," he said, "and I'm going to gamble on you two. I've been watching you both and this lousy set-up is really getting to you, unless I'm dimmer than I used to be. Right?"

My mind must have been working quicker than usual, I guess, because I began to see a new picture.

"Who are you, Leo?" I asked, "a Fed, or some other branch?"

"Not bad," he said. "Glad your brain is functioning. Yes, I'm an agent. The bureau has been quite interested in Sally for a long time, and it took me two years to get this close to him. But no one ever thought of the van D'Alliance Chronocron, damn your drunken genius of a husband, Ellen-Sue."

"I know," she said. "I never thought he was worth anything, either, just a meal ticket after too many cheap bars and bad times. I knew he was no good, rat down inside, but I was no prize, either; so I had no decent complaint. Even when he had me sent back with you to that awful place, I guess I deserved it. But not now. Not with those rats killing kids and letting innocent people get eaten up and buried and all."

I put my hand over her shoulders and pulled her over next to me on the bed. She'd never had much and neither had I and it felt good to know we were being honest. She didn't pull away either.

"What can we do?" I said. "I think you realize we'll both help. I've trimmed a few marks in my life but not this kind of a thing. It has to be stopped someway, anyway."

"I don't know, and that's the

hell of it. I have no signaling equipment and frankly don't know where we are myself. I think it's the Caribbean somewhere, but I'm not even sure of that. The boats are always tightly guarded by imported muscle, and if I make a move out of line, then all eyes get turned my way. Goldy watches me, I watch him, and everyone watches everyone else. Sally is no Rhodes scholar, but he's damnably clever at hiring technical talent and setting up security arrangements. I simply haven't got one clue as to how to get a message off this island, let alone get off myself. And now we have to move fast, very fast. You see"

"Wait a minute," I cut in, "you should hear a funny thing about your pal, Goldy. It may not mean much, but" and I went on to fill him in on Goldy's overheard private chat in the native lingo. This got him very excited indeed.

"You're sure Doakes, that it was Goldy? No chance of a mistake?"

"No, it was him. And I saw one of the locals slide off down the rocks a little later. Mean anything?"

"Maybe a lot. I've always pegged him for a dumb killer, though now and again he gets an odd look in his eyes. But if he can talk this weird native gibberish, then he's not that. But what is he? Not one of our people, for sure." He went si-

lent for a bit, and we waited while he tried to figure it out. After a bit he started again.

"Look, just keep an eye on him, I don't know what his game is and I can't trust him in case he's one of Sally's deep-cover types. That creep could run the CIA if he were half-way honest. He has a flair for covert operations. Anyway, I started to tell you something else, which is more important. Everyone who wants to use the Chronocron at present has to come here first, OK? But, Jones, or whatever his name is — and he's got to be traced — has found a new gimmick. He's pretty sure he can build other time-gates elsewhere in the world and lock them in to the same area and moment in the past as this one. See what that means?"

I thought for a second, but Ellen-Sue beat me to it. "It means no one can any longer, ever step them at all. If you close one, they go to another or build another one or somethin'. And the varmints and trash keep comin' right out the past and eatin' babies and such!"

"Right! So for God's sake put on your thinking caps and keep your eyes open! Sally has something big planned for this weekend, though I have no idea what it is." He punched my shoulder, patted her on the head and slipped out. I gave her a small hug and we both sat for a while in the dark without talking. At least we had a friend

and some new ideas. The problem now was what to do with them.

Saturday came around and with it a new big notice on the bulletin board. Everybody was to wear party clothes for a grand hotel opening, and buses and trucks would pick us up at five p.m. that afternoon. I spent the afternoon cleaning and sharpening an old rusty machete I had found a week before on a path. It was so worn down it was only a foot and a half long and a couple of inches wide, but this made it easier to jam into my pants. Sally's parties had a way of turning out rough on the guests, and the machete wasn't much but it was the best I could do.

The sun started to go down at last and we all met on the terrace. Prominent in front was Sally and with him was none other than Bushveldt Barnstaffel, my beloved former employer. Here he was grinning and cracking jokes and slapping Sally on the back till you wanted to get sick.

I hadn't seen him around for a couple of weeks, and we had figured out, Ellen-Sue and me, that he was back in the past, building the El Crooko, Hideout Hilton, or at least seeing it was built right. He must have done the job to Sally's approval, because he was also in white jacket and black tie, looking as slimy as his new owner.

We all piled into some buses and Goldy and Leo sat opposite me.

I looked at Goldy's dead, cold eyes and wondered if I'd made a mistake. He looked merely stuffed.

Eventually we went down the tunnel and the machine door shut on us. This time a ramp was ready and the whole busload ran up and into the thing. It really was a fantastic arrangement, and when I saw Motley, half-gassed and slumped in a corner seat by himself, it seemed impossible it could have come out of that gin-head skull of his.

When the humming finally stopped and the bus rolled down the outer ramp into the sunset again, I grabbed the arm of my seat as well as Ellen-Sue's hand. But I could have relaxed. Old Nose-horn was a thing of the past.

All the close-at-hand trees and brush had been cut down, and a tarred road ran up to a big pink building with a red tile roof. There were lights all over and ferns covered the ground where the scrub had been. Some clumps of tall trees were left in places for shade, I guess, and bunches of the fat-trunked palms grew here and there. Down on the beach, actually in the water, was a whopper of a steel fence twenty feet high and anchored on big concrete pilings. I could see both triple-strand barb wire and electric insulators set on top of the fence, which stretched along the coast out of sight in both directions.

The bus did not head for the big building, but took a fork along the beach and followed a road along for about a mile or so. I watched the water, but saw no long-necked whatsits of any kind coming up to grab at us. What I did see were tall towers set at regular intervals and in them searchlights and the noses of those bazooka-type guns. Leo and Goldy were looking around too, and Leo pointed to the nearest tower.

"Anything gets near the fence, which is electrified, I guess, one of those recoilless rifles blasts it. After a while, even a dumb dinosaur could learn to stay away, eh, Goldy?"

"I guess," said Goldy. But I was watching him now as I never used to before, and I thought I saw a spark in the dull glims as he swivelled his head back and forth.

By now, we had reached a place where the fence came out of the sea and ran to our left over the ground. We swung left on the road to stay parallel with it and I noticed the towers were set now twice as thick. Beyond the fence was an area of low swamp and really a terrible stink came in the open windows.

"In case you are wondering, folks," yells Sally from up front, "this smell is dead meat! We are on a peninsula, or point, for those which cut school like Doaksey and me, of land sticking out into the

ocean. With this fence, plus the artillery, we keep the bad guys from coming through from the mainland. Quite a layout, huh?"

The bus stopped and we all got out and looked at the swamp, trying not to breathe in the awful smell. As far as we could see was a flat country with bunches of tall reeds, twenty feet high and winding black water in between the clumps. In the sunset it looked dead and glomy. Ellen-Sue shivered and held my arm.

Over our heads, from the tower, came a long loud "whoosh," followed by an explosion, far out in the swamp.

Out of the reeds came a greenish neck like a giant, mobile crane, with a little flat head on the end. From the open mouth a hooting scream came like the grandfather of all steam engine whistles. A tremendous thrashing flattened acres of reeds and black mud flew way up in the air. I caught a glimpse of a slimy body the size of a Goodyear blimp, and then there were more "whooshes," from our tower and the nearest ones on the left and right, with lots more explosions and that mind-bending hooting noise, which never stopped.

Even Sally had enough and he waved us all back into the bus, his fat face even paler than usual. We drove off in a hurry, but the continued explosions and the dinosaur's

death yells followed after us a long ways. How long would it take to die, I thought?

We crossed the fenced-off peninsula and went back up a beach road on the other side, a mirror copy of the first, complete with the same fence and guard towers. Eventually we got back to a road slanting up to the big pink building, all of us pretty shaky in the knees. The reality of this place was hard to take, even when you had been there before. I wondered just how many millions this all must have cost and how many more had been paid in by the prospective customers.

By now the sun was down on the horizon and more lights were coming on, as we pulled up a long driveway and stopped in front of the pink place. It was bigger than I had thought, like a super gambling casino I once saw in Cuba, back before Castro. It looked new and raw, but the furniture was something else, and inside there were glass chandeliers that must have weighed a ton apiece. There were uniformed servants all over, some of them women, and a guy came up and passed me and Ellen-Sue some champagne from a loaded tray. Lots more guests were arriving now, and I stood back to one side and took a look at them. Both sexes were well represented, though the women were all younger and a lot

better looking, in nonwifely ways, which figured.

I saw a lot of types like Sally, but the Unione Sicilione was hardly alone. There were several blond guys, like Krauts or Swedes, and a lot of fancy uniforms and dark faces, some of which looked vaguely familiar. An old bald guy with a girl on each arm tottered past, and Leo sucked in his breath behind me.

"So he really didn't die in Berlin, or Paraguay either!" I looked at the old guy again, but he meant nothing to me.

A waiter passed us all slips of paper, with a message on it written in ten different languages. The American on mine said: "Please do not discuss your own or anyone else's past. Please do not ask questions either of, or about the other guests. The reasons for this are obvious. Thank you. The Management."

Conversation died while everyone read their piece of paper, but picked up quickly again, and the papers got dropped in ashtrays. More drinks were served and I saw a huge bar at one side where you could get anything not being passed already.

Ellen-Sue and I walked around and eyeballed the place. It was hard to believe. There were even polar bear rugs on the floor, and the door knobs and lamp switches looked like real gold. The tables were

either mahogany or a good imitation, and a big marble fountain was even fizzing up in the middle of the main room.

Off on the sides, you could see lots more rooms, including a huge dining one with a buffet-smorgasbord set-up a mile long. I noticed at least two pool tables in their own rooms, as I wandered up and down the various halls, and big marble stairs led up to the second floor at several points. The place looked like Buzby Berkeley musical set crossed with something out of the Arabian Nights. If all the lice out in the main hall were paying out billions, it looked like Sally was going to at least try and give them their money's worth.

Eventually, Ellen-Sue and I got bored with all the fancy furniture and stuff and went back to the festivities. Everybody was in groups now, all Cosa Nostra here, all loud gold-braid uniforms there, and so on. None of the various outfits seemed inclined to get together, though Sally and a couple of other hoods were trying to circulate. The talk and squeals of the call girls would start up and then stop. So there were funny bits of quiet when all you could hear was the help shoving glasses around or shuffling silverware. As a fun party it was a wet smack to me.

I was about to tow Ellen-Sue into the food room when I heard

Leo whisper behind me.

"This place will have to slow down in the very early morning. There are a million bedrooms upstairs. You two pick one and then sneak down here to the front door at five a.m. sharp. This will probably be the only chance we'll ever get to get back into that damned machine when the guards will be slack. It's not much of a chance but it's the only one I can think of." Then he was gone, faded back into the crowd. I felt the old chopper cold against my ribs under the jacket and shivered. Ellen-Sue squeezed my hand and we went in together and ate. I'd just lost my appetite, but I figured we'd need the energy.

The food was like everything else there, caviar plus the trimmings. It all tasted like mud, the way I felt, but I managed to choke something down off a gold plate handed me by a uniformed flunky. It might have been hummingbird tongues or, equally, old whale guts, because I was beyond caring or noticing. I signaled Ellen-Sue and we carried our plates out and upstairs.

Like our FBI informant had said, there were miles of bedroom doors opening off long corridors. We grabbed the nearest, ducked in and then ducked out again even quicker, followed by a lot of curses and yells. One creep and his companion had not waited for dessert downstairs.

We ran around a corner and eventually found an empty suite, because it even had a sitting room plus bath along with the bedroom. It was so impressive I looked around for the TV, before realizing the local stations were unlikely to be working. The door had a bolt, I was glad to see, and I locked it, wondering why the clown we had interrupted hadn't. In a hurry, I guess.

We chatted a little, but neither of us felt much like yakking, and we finally just lay down and rested, eyes open and counting the clicks on my wrist watch. We could hear the party getting louder down below through the open windows, and eventually I got up and shut them, which turned it down to a dull hum. All I could think of was how many Godawful horrors had been dumped back in our time to pay for Sally's little house-warming binge.

Eventually, things quieted down, and by four o'clock I could open a window and hear nothing but a gentle breeze blowing in from the sea. Searchlights played along the water here and there, doing the monster-watch bit, but there was no gunfire. I wondered if that big dinosaur was still alive back by the fence. Somewhere I remembered reading those things were so stupid they didn't even know when they had been killed.

We watched the first pale light come over the land and glitter on the quiet sea, and I put my arm around Ellen-Sue's waist, while she snuggled up. I think both of us figured this was going to be the last day for us, but we didn't say anything.

So probably we were the first to see what was coming.

Away out on the horizon, miles away, I noticed a wavy line building up on the water, like the line a squall makes when it comes. But there was no sound of any wind and the sky was perfectly clear, a few late stars dimming out in the west as the sun came up behind us. I pointed to the dark line and Ellen-Sue stared at it too. While we watched, it seemed to get bumpier and flecks of white foam began to appear. All I could suddenly think of was a description of a tidal wave, something I had never personally seen and didn't want to. My watch said it wasn't quite five, but I had a sudden urge to get the hell out of this crazy place.

We ran for the door, whipped it open and tore down the stairs. There was good old Leo standing by the front entrance, and as we appeared, he opened it a crack, peeped out and then waved his hand for us to get moving.

We all scurried outside into the growing light and ran through bushes and into a garden with clip-

ped paths leading everywhere. A drunk's shoes and pants stuck out of one bush, and I've often wondered since if it was Motley. I hope so.

At this point we all froze. A whole bunch of sirens went off, over to our left, where the beach and ocean were hidden by trees, and I figured we'd been spotted and that it was all over. But no one came our way, though people began to yell back at the house and further off, and then I figured out what had happened.

"They spotted a tidal wave coming," I gasped to Leo. "We saw it from upstairs, way out on the water. Let's get out of here!"

We made even better time after that, and the garden was over in no time. Next, as we broke out into the open, on the road leading to the time machine, all Hell really broke loose. An artillery barrage started, like Stalingrad or D-Day, and mixed in with it came howling and crashing noises like all the world's zoos being broken up and bulldozed with the animals still inside. The "tidal wave" had arrived.

As far out as you could see, the ocean was boiling with giant bodies, as God knows how many swimming monsters raced for the shore, their flappers churning up huge waves that rushed in front of them. They were all the same kind, with bodies something like the plesiosaur thing I had seen the shark

get, but different, too. They ranged from what must have been a hundred feet long, down to maybe thirty or forty, and had short heavy necks with heads like giant crocodiles, full of teeth like Bowie knives. And they were only a hundred yards offshore and coming fast.

All the guard towers in sight were blasting at them full tilt, but you might as well have tried to douse an oil rig fire with spit. For every one that got hit, and it only seemed to make them mad, a dozen more churned past, bellowing and screaming. There had to be thousands of them and they all had one idea, which was to hit the beach.

"Come on!" yelled Leo in my ear. "That electric fence won't hold for five seconds. This whole place is going under!"

That juiced us into moving and we took off for the time gate like Jesse Owens. I kept looking at the beach as we panted down the road, and, boy, was Leo right! I saw the first wave hit that fence and sparks flew all along the line of ten-foot heads. Then — the fence was just gone and the whole bunch of freight-train bodies were wallowing and hauling themselves up onto the sand, with waves washing up ahead of them and clouds of sand and spray being pushed up by the flippers. If I'd needed more adrenalin, that view gave it to me!

We each took one of Ellen-Sue's

elbows and raced up to the big port. There were no guards, and I guess they had taken off when they saw what was coming. As I climbed in last, I turned and took one more look back. It was unbelievable. The towers were all down, and a steady wave of screaming tons of reptile meat was pouring out of the ocean and flopping and crawling up to the hotel, smashing everything in their way. They moved like circus seals, which is a lot faster than you might think, and just as the port shut, I saw the first ones rear up against one wing of Sally's hideaway and smash into it and through it like it was paper. That was the last I saw of monsterland and I sat down with a thud on the steel floor, pulling Ellen-Sue with me. When I looked up, I saw we had company.

Leo was standing in a half crouch, his right hand frozen as he reached for his coat. Facing him was Goldy, and *his* automatic was out and pointing.

"Please don't, Leo," said Goldy. "You'd never make it, you know." His voice was now educated and the dull eyes were lit up. He was even smiling.

"I have nothing against you, Colonel," he went on. "If you give your word, I'll put the gun away. How's that for trust?"

"What's with the 'colonel' bit?" I asked. "Leo's an FBI man, chum, so be careful."

Goldy laughed. "That wasn't quite truthful, Leo. I'm glad I listened to the room tapes when you were out." He turned to us and wagged a finger. "Let me introduce Lt. Col. Leonid Krassin of the KGB, or Soviet Security Service. As it happens, my name is Arthur Goldthwaite, and, oddly enough, I am the United States representative, though not, regrettably, from the bureau. Well, Leo what about a deal?"

"OK," said Leo, straightening up. "The USSR wants this thing smashed as badly as anyone. How did you get on to me? I thought I was pretty good."

"Oh, you're good, pal," said Goldy stowing his gun under his arm. "Thing is, I've been following *you*, not Sally Tomatoes. We wanted to know why the KGB put a top operator in with a bunch of hoods. All this time-travel stuff was a big surprise to me. And then I was stuck on that damn island, with no way to tell anyone." They both ignored me and Ellen-Sue and went on talking shop while we gawped at each other and listened.

Leo laughed. "Now I know why there were no guards on this apparatus. Are they dead?"

"They are now," was the answer. "*Kronosaurus*" will see to that. But you still haven't told me what you're doing here."

"Very simple. We discovered

that many Fascists, old Nazis, new ones, all the assorted scum of the political earth, were beginning to give lots of money to gangsters, both in America and elsewhere. Looking for protection, I imagine, since all governments are now hunting them down. I was sent to follow them, by becoming a gangster myself. Like you, I had no way of knowing this drunken pig van D'Alliance was going to invent a working time machine. I had thought at one time of trying to get the plans. But now I think not. It is better destroyed. You agree?"

"I sure as hell do. But the time's almost up. We may have trouble getting out of here. And what made you bring these two?" He waved a hand at us.

Leo shrugged. "Sentimentality, I think. They are not criminals, really, and both were sickened by the murders and bloodshed these people have loosed on our century. Do I gather, my friend, you know what those last animals were, which invaded the beaches?"

"I think so," said Goldy. "I borrowed some of Jones' books when he was asleep or knocked out with dope. That was *Kronosaurus* or something close, a giant plesiosaur, an extinct marine reptile. While I was watching them appear, it occurred to me the place might be an annual nesting ground, like with sea turtles. That would ac-

count for them swarming in all at once." He looked at his watch. "Anyway, it put paid to time travel for crooks, at least temporarily. And if Jones and van D'Alliance are still there" He glanced at Ellen-Sue and looked a little embarrassed. I thought of Bushveldt with no regrets at all.

"Don't you mind about me," she said. "Motley threw *me* back there, remember? But, say, isn't the machine noise dying down?"

Both men drew their guns and I pulled Ellen-Sue over to one side. The big chamber was empty, but we could at least get out of any direct lines of fire. The humming stopped and we could hear the bolts sliding open on the other side of the port. Slowly, the thing opened.

What happened was so quick it was all over in seconds. I don't know why Sally had gone back from his bash or what made him suspicious of his two pet hoods, but he was waiting. Maybe he just wasn't taking chances, but Leo had said how good he was at security. I just don't know and now I never will.

There was the rattle of a machine gun, and both Leo and Goldy were blasted back into the chamber, shot full of holes. They never even had time to pull a trigger.

I waited without breathing, Ellen-Sue behind me. I heard a

step, then another. Sally's head poked past the line of the hatch, looking down at the two dead men. It stayed there. He never even saw me.

I brought the old cane knife down on his plump neck so hard it cut through bone and went on, leaving blood all over me and the corpses, Ellen-Sue and the metal floor. And, you know, I felt great, looking at that head bounce away.

I looked out and there was no one else there in the big room at all. The guards must have been sent away so Sally could be alone. The empty ramp led up to the sunlight, and that was it.

Ellen-Sue stopped and looked at me. "We gonna fix this thing, Joe?" she asked. "Won't be no other chance, and these two poor guys got mighty dead trying."

"Yeah," I agreed. "But how? Neither of us can run this thing."

"I watched real careful, Joe, and so did Leo. It runs just like on automatic when *this* door is bolted. Now just suppose, for instance, we open the *other* door a teeny bit, or even just unlock it? Then we shut this one. What happens now if this thing goes back with one door open?"

I thought for a minute. What would happen if the thing had a gate open and rushed back millions of years into the past? What would come in while it was moving, mov-

ing back into time, whatever "time" was?

"Get ready up at the top," I said. "Watch out for anyone who might be on guard. Here." I handed her Leo's gun, after wiping it on his sleeve, the dry one. Then I stepped wetly over Sally's head and went back to unlock the inside catches on the other port.

Ten seconds later I was closing the *outer* catches, on the tunnel side. When the last one was tight, I waited. Sure enough, the humming started. I ran like hell for daylight, and then some. I don't think anybody alive knew what kind of force that damn machine built up, and I didn't want a close view of any malfunction, either!

At the top, Ellen-Sue met me with good news. No one was in sight, but there was an empty jeep with a key in it. This must have been Sally's. He wouldn't need it. He was going back to his paradise hotel, minus head, with two dead secret agents as bodyguards.

We tore down the hill road and went straight past the big house, heading for the little harbor. At the gate, two goons were lounging in the shade and they slouched over, not suspicious. I guess they had seen us around enough. Fortunately, they both looked to be halfwits.

"Any of these motor cruisers gassed up?" I asked casually.

"So who wants to know, bud?"

You know the rules around here."

"I do!" said Ellen-Sue, sticking her gun up his nose. "And you better too, mister, 'cause that crazy machine is running wild up there, Mister Big Boss is stone-cold *dead*, and this whole rat pit of an island is probably going to *blow up*!"

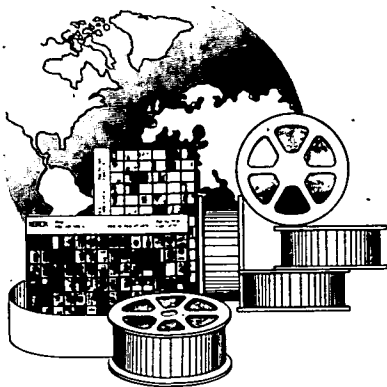
That did it. Ten minutes later, the two hoods in one boat, minus hardware, and us in another were creaming out through the entrance. We had no map, so we just went west and hoped. Where they went, I never heard.

About an hour later, when we were well out of sight of the island, a great big smooth wave came out of the east and picked us up by the rear end and shook us before going on. When the ocean got calm again, we just looked at each other. But we never heard a sound.

You know, we weren't over fifty miles from the mainland? Never mind *which* mainland, either. But not too far from a town where I could swipe a car and Ellen-Sue could hock her jewelry (in her purse the whole time; she just "had a feeling") for enough to get us airline tickets. We didn't need passports either, if that's a clue.

Yeah, we found the money in the Swiss accounts. Half what Sally said, and so I stopped any tears which might have got started. And we're living OK. And no more live freight or dead weight is appearing

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out of the past any more. And the scientists are all busy writing papers about what they think happened. So here's mine. No time like the present.

Greg Benford has been coming along, coming along as a professional SF writer after years of high status in the SF fan community. Working alone and with Gordon Eklund, Benford has been contributing important stories to the field, many of them for this publication. Now he has produced *In the Ocean of Night*, a novel made by welding some of these parts into a unified structure, and it is a major novel.

Something very good is happening in SF. A new generation has arrived in the ranks of writers, and is establishing a clear voice of its own, taking the best of what it can assimilate from the past and creating a characteristic new sound by melding that with its own contemporary view of the world.

This has been happening with a kind of regularity ever since *Astounding Stories of Super Science* displaced the Gernsback magazines in popular favor, only to yield — almost overnight, it now seems — to “modern science fiction” in the *Astounding Science Fiction* of the late 1930s, which in turn lost its pre-eminence to the *F&SF* and *Galaxy* of the early 1950s. And so forth. Each of these stages, coming at intervals which were usually ten years apart, but sometimes five or fifteen, actually represented the ap-

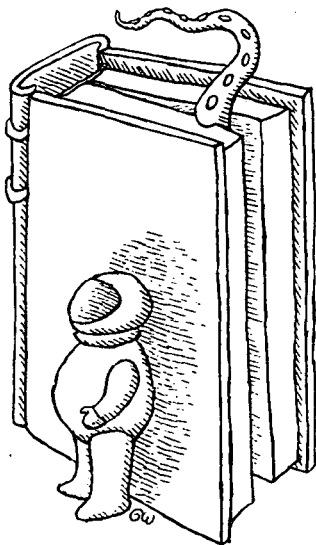
ALGIS BUDRYS

Books

In The Ocean of Night, Gregory Benford. Dial Press, \$8.95

High Couch of Silistra, Janet E. Morris. Bantam Books, \$1.75

Stellar Science Fiction Stories #3, Judy-Lynn del Rey, Ed. Del Rey Books, \$1.95



pearance of a strong core of new writers. In the past, these would center on some particular magazine, carrying with them the best writers of the previous generations and lending special status to some one particular medium. In the 1960s, however, the "New Wave" which was started in England by Michael Moorcock as editor of *New Worlds*, reached far beyond its parent journal, and at a time when we were beginning a dozen years of prominence for the original book anthology. Consequently, the "New Wave" and its successor, the social protest SF of the late 1960s and early 1970s, were not housed in some one location, and it became more difficult to perceive that, nevertheless, for some reason, new writers do not rise to prominence continuously, but in pulses.

To some extent, this is an artifact. One swallow does not make a summer, and therefore many a writer who is perfectly sure he is going along at his own pace, and doing perfectly good work, has to wait for critical acceptance until the critical establishment can detect that something important is happening in general. Then there is a category to fit him or her into, and everyone feels more comfortable. At this distance in time, for example, it is possible to classify Robert Sheckley, Michael Shaara, Jerome Bixby and Algis Budrys as Post-Modern-

ist writers. But four more different people and orientations would be difficult to find attending the same meeting of the old Hydra Club, and at the time the best we could do was talk about a Class of 1951, and not very loud, at that.*

But although one always has to fudge a little — Robert Silverberg is either a late Post-Modernist or an early New Waver, except that what he considers his important work is done in the quasi-satirical social protest vein but marked by an anti-romanticism so deliberate as to pass beyond cynicism and reflect its underlying romantic biases, if you follow me — it appears to be true that every ten years or so we have a period of consolidation, during which it is possible to know who the important writers are and what the shape of SF has become. And then one morning we look around and find that "overnight" there is a significant change. Writers who have been appearing one by one, doing "interesting" work, winning an award here and there, but not seeming to be in the top rank as yet, suddenly clump up into a school,

*Bixby, by the way, needs a lot more critical attention paid to him, as an editor and as a writer both. Few historians of this field seem to know how much he contributed in various ways. It was quite a lot. And Shaara, of course, went on to win a Pulitzer.

and it becomes clear that they have acquired a significance that goes beyond talent and operates without respect to the success or failure of any one given story. They are where "it" is at, and all previous ways of doing SF are having a new light cast upon them.

Which means that I think Gregory Benford, George R.R. Martin, and John Varley, have joined Joe Haldeman and become the nucleus of a group which probably also includes James Tiptree, Jr. (Sheldon), as well as many other writers who ought to be doing novels. Some of them, like Bixby and Shaara in their time, will not appear large in the eyes of the 1990s, probably because only Ray Bradbury and Harlan Ellison have made it big without producing a novel.* Some of them will protest vigorously that they have nothing in common with the others, and a few may even be more or less right about that. Each of them, like Silverberg or any other real talent, becomes less and less homogenous when studied in depth and detail. But the generalization will hold.

The central identifying characteristic of this new school is that it takes science fiction seriously. This represents a sharp reversal of a fif-

teen-year-old tendency toward satire and allegory which made mere "science fiction" a totally inadequate label and necessitated the use of "SF" as a covering term.

Collaterally, this means the re-appearance of the effective hero. Male or female, the protagonists of these stories are not the helpless victims of massive irreversible forces. They are people whose energies and intelligence have been directed to the acquisition of skills which make changes in the situation. Not great changes, some of them. But changes which rise from an understanding that the universe is real, with real rules, and a feeling that even though one may not grasp their full extent, nevertheless it is possible to use the known rules in dealing with problems.

Sidney Coleman, the SF fan and occasional F&SF reviewer who in his secret identity as Doctor Doom is a world-renowned theoretical physicist, once said: "The two purposes of any science are to explain what has happened and to change what might be done." The SF writers of this presently emerging generation seem to instinctively understand and accept that definition, with its implicit statement that the unexpected is constantly occurring, but that its mystery will yield to systematic investigation, and that this process can be used to increase humankind's security and effec-

**All of Bradbury's "novels" are skillfully melded short story collections, except that Fahrenheit 451 is a blown-up novella.*

tiveness in an impersonal universe.

Robert Novotny, Ph.D., recently said: "Nature doesn't want you to live. Nature wants you to die so you can replenish it." This may seem an oversimplified and extreme view to some, especially those whose experience of Nature is limited to Central Park, or even to backpacking, polystyrene compass in hand, over marked trails in "wilderness" patrolled by rangers and supported by a technology which can afford mountain rescue teams. It is a view at odds with the supposition that "natural foods" can be purchased with money in processed packages at a store in an urban center. It tends to deny that what feels good is OK *per se*, with no need to examine whether what feels good is in fact the path to Nirvana rather than the compost heap.

Whatever the actual merits of any given world-view, the past ten years of SF have regarded Nature as consciously benign, and the role of human beings as one limited to each individual's search for a personal apotheosis in the face of homogenizing social forces, with technology an intruder on personal freedom and on Nature's vast plan. This was in contrast to John W. Campbell's earnest Technocratic leanings, which brooked no thought but that there was no plan except what Man might make, and that technology was propelling us all to-

ward godhead on an exponential curve.*

What we have now from Benford, *et al*, is unique because while it turns from the view of the decade which ended in the early 1970s, it does not embrace wholeheartedly the seeming simplicism of the 1940s. Thomas M. Disch is suddenly a little old fashioned, but that does not mean Everett B. Cole is made new. Disch continues to be an artist, and Cole continues to be something other than that; Disch endures and Cole does not. But each is made a little different.

The hero of *In the Ocean of Night* is Nigel Walmsley, a British astronaut attached to NASA in the later years of this century. A skillfully drawn character — especially for a writer who is a California physicist — Walmsley thus enjoys that slight aura of alienation which represents a recurrent theme in "modern" science fiction. But he lives in a triadic marriage very reminiscent of the social arrangements of antiscience SF. As an active participant in technology, he is sent on a mission to divert or destroy Icar-

**You see where generalization takes us? How does this square up with Campbell's own "Twilight?" I think it does, but I think you have to think very hard about it before the melancholy mood and circumstances of that story fulfill the Technocratic ideal. That ideal was not as simplistic, as some make it out to be, obviously, but that's another study.*

us, the eccentric asteroid, which suddenly begins a plunge toward Earth. As a self-directed personality, he disregards Ground Control upon discovering that Icarus is actually a long-abandoned alien interstellar vessel, lands, and explores. As a human being with human impulses, he half-accidentally activates one surviving component which, we later learn, turns out to be a signalling device. As a man skilled in the verbal knife-fights of bureaucracy, he manages to capitalize on his actions, and to preserve his status so that he can continue to participate in the events which follow.*

As you will recall if you have read, here, Benford's "A Snark in The Night," Walmsley next must cope with the problem of an alien drone entering the Solar System, while simultaneously attempting to resolve his emotional problems as one of his wives, suffering from a disease born of technological pollution, gradually succumbs. But Benford is too much a Post-Allegorist not to intertwine these two seemingly discrete developments. He

**Campbellian heroes also characteristically had trouble with bureaucrats. This interesting parallel does not hold inflexibly, however, since they always solved the problem by steamrolling their prissy, puffing adversaries. Walmsley is a cooler cat, as befits an author who has paid his dues at grantsmanship.*

makes each dramatically stronger in the process, and then merges them into one unified development which to some extent transforms him, changes both Earth and, to an appropriate extent, the universe, and leads on to further story developments. Those developments steadily increase the physical scope of the story, involving greater and greater perspectives, until at the end his novel evokes a truly majestic feeling for the vast distances and time-scales upon which the universe operates. But he never loses focus on Walmsley, who continues to be a distinct human being.

This is work on the award-winning level. More important even than that, I think, is that it presents a coherent view of people who, though seemingly born and dead in a twinkling, and far too feeble to affect the falling of a star, nevertheless can not only dream greatly but can, on occasion, do that which endures. I came away from this piece of work with a sense that though the heavens are wide, yet the human spirit can fare well upon them. And I was struck by the fact that this story is called neither *Men Against the Stars* nor *You Ain't Got a Chance*. Welcome, Dr. Benford, *et al*; you are making something else of us all.

High Couch of Silistra is part of a trilogy, and Janet E. Morris's first

novel. It's dirty as hell, and replete with the kind of bondage fetishism that makes "John Norman's" *Gor* series such an ornament to our genre. Nevertheless, it's a rather good story of adventure on a planet far removed from ours in space and time, and the outré social system springs logically from Morris's stringently worked-out biological premise. While Morris has not invented anything new in the way of telling this kind of story, nor dressed it in anything but familiar raiment — the culture is a little like that of the Greek city-states, the heroine has a quasi-tame winged lion, and, sure enough, her perils lead her eventually to a sort of dimensional gateway inscribed with the same mysterious characters as those on the enigmatic talisman she carries — Morris has a lot of narrative talent, and an unusually high standard of prose composition.

I cannot honestly tell you that the story would not be as good if it did not go into such detail in describing the varied sexual exploits of Estri Hadrath Diet Estrazi and those whom she encounters on her quest. To some extent, they are there for their own sake, and may that feature guide you in your decision to buy or not buy this book. But it is a good story, told by a good storyteller, and while it advances the art not one whit, what the hell.

We have here *Stellar* #3, the latest in just about the healthiest of the original anthology series, maverick successor to the paperback short SF media of the past decade. Editor Judy-Lynn del Rey's premise is that what readers want is stories with beginnings, middles and ends; clearcut narratives to be read and enjoyed. The sales successes of the previous volumes, which also include one book of short novels, bear her out.

But *Stellar* 3 ought not to sell as well, if that premise is correct, for very few of the stories in this particular volume fit the premise. They are a bad bunch, relieved only by Clifford D. Simak's "Auk House," which would not shine quite as brightly in more adept company.

I don't know what to make of this. Judy-Lynn is a tough, knowledgeable editor, and her application of these same general principles has made Ballantine Books a major sales success and Del Rey books a vigorous offshoot. More than any other present Ballantine editor, she has rescued a house which eked along marginally for decades and whose SF line was so idiosyncratic as to bury the occasional spectacular title in an overcast of dismal underachievement. But *Stellar* 3 reads as if hastily combed-together in a race against a bi-weekly deadline, rather than as a careful selection of the best top-rate

material available over the long schedules of this infrequent periodical.

"No Hiding Place," the lead novelette, by Jack L. Chalker, is a weak, padded, rambling author-omniscient story about a house haunted by time travellers. It begins and ends when the author is ready to lay down those particular cards, and it has a middle only because there are parcels of words which by definition fall between those two points. It will entertain the naïve reader because that idea has entertained several generations, but it simply does not fit the del Rey definition, and has no narrative drive to substitute for its lack of an identifiable protagonist or a developing plot.

Essentially the same criticism applies to Arsen Darnay's "Salty's Sweep," which is also egregiously cute, and to Mildred Downey Broxon's "The Book of Padraig," which is at least a readable piece of prose. But now the first third of the book is solidly omniscient — that is, each of these three authors simplistically reveals, at an arbitrarily selected time, what has been withheld from the reader, except that what is withheld is transparently obvious from the beginning.

Gene DeWeese's "When You Wish Upon a Star" continues this essentially unexciting technique, overdressing it with flashback

chapters. This approach is simply not suited to action stories, not even to the sort of intellectual action which created the "Golden Age" to which these stories are supposed to hark back. The only similarity between this sort of work and Golden Age stories is that the ideas are the same. One is strongly reminded of the manner in which Rod Serling, RIP, mined the literature of SF for "original" notions with which to astonish the TV masses.

B. Lee Cooper and Larry S. Haverkos then collaborate to produce "An Error in Punctuation," a trifle which not only confers a purely Lithuanian first name — I won't tell you which one — on an Anglo-Saxon character, but, far more to the point, recalls nothing so much as the sort of notional filler that John Campbell was publishing in *Astounding* at the time it was turning into *Analog*; that is, the Tin Age. By definition, this kind of "story" cannot possibly have a plot, for which it must substitute either a genuine laugh or a fresh insight. This one fails on either count, and surely Judy-Lynn could see that.

Steven Utley's "The Thirteenth Labor" is longer, somewhat better, but, again, fails to present either a fresh idea or, lacking that, a convincingly rendered mood. Utley is simply not up to the demands of prose competence or characterization required to bring off this idea,

which is an adumbrated version of Lester del Rey's much cleaner "Though Dreamers Die."

Bill Starr's "The People Who Could Not Kill" is yet *another* notional short-short; a set-up piece of verbalization without ingenuity. It is followed by Henry Melton's "We Hold These Rights ..." which represents this volume's first serious attempt to say something new-ish, but founders on Melton's inability to characterize his protagonist. So the "story" boils down into a late-Campbellian lecture, populated by cardboard lay figures, none of them, not even the central one, properly posed.

Jeffrey M. Wallman's "Chasing Shadows" is another of that kind. Rather more skillfully told, it reveals its essential emptiness by the flippancy of its pseudo-colloquial title. Again, the evocation is not of the 1940s, or even of the briefly vigorous *Galaxy* which appropriated some top Campbell writers with topflight stories in the early 1950s, but of the dead-ended *Astounding* of the early 1960s. Charles Runyon's "Metafusion" is, if anything,

from the back pages of *New Worlds*. Only the Simak remains, to shame the rest.

In addition, *Stellar 3* very probably represents the first appearance, ever, of the terms "mono-dialogue" and "evangelicalism," though the latter does at first glance reflect some resemblance to English used with normalcy. But there are other examples, which I would have noted had my blue pencil not leapt from my hand on some impulse of escapisticism motivated by incredulment.

This is a lengthy indictment. But my interest in good stories well told, with that skill which produces a *satisfactory* beginning, a middle, and a *meaningful* end, is dear to me, and was taught to me by the people who made of the Golden Age something that endures beyond any onset of transient fashion. The principles which Judy-Lynn del Rey espouses, and proclaims in every issue of *Stellar*, are no more rightful to her than they are to me, or, apparently, to a great many SF readers. And they are simply not embodied here.



Mr. Barrett's new story is an offbeat and, in a way, oddly moving fantasy about a salesman who is caught up in a living hell of stewardesses and snack trays and airline meals. We will never complain about flying again.

The Flying Stutzman

by NEAL BARRETT, JR.

Angela always told him at the door, "Lew, you look like a dead person. You didn't sleep on the plane?" And he always said, "No I didn't sleep on the plane, I *can't* sleep on the plane, Angela." Angela wanted to know why and Stutzman didn't know. Ten years on the road, eleven in September, could he remember even a minute sleeping on the plane? "You should try, Lew," she told him. "You should try and get some sleep. You look like a dead person." I *feel* like a dead person, he wanted to tell her.

Stutzman squinted out the little round window. Flat banks of perfectly white clouds covered the earth. He liked to look at clouds. You could look at a cloud all day and not think about anything. Once when he got home he told Angela, "Nobody ever hurt his head, looking at a cloud."

It was maybe the one good thing about flying. The rest was a noth-

ing. And he could give up the clouds, easy. You like clouds, get a picture and put it in the den and look at clouds. An airplane you don't need to see a cloud.

The fat lady in the next seat ate oranges. She had a whole sack of oranges in a little net bag like you get in the store. She would peel an orange and drop the peelings in the pocket on the back of the seat, which was already stuffed to the top. A nice surprise, thought Stutzman, for Miss Stuck-Up the stewardess, who had time, all right, to twitch her ass for Mr. Joe College in the back but no time to get coffee for Stutzman. Fine. She should get a handful of oranges.

Stutzman closed his eyes and thought about being home. He thought quickly past the baggage-limo-taxi part and on to Angela. She would meet him at the door. Maybe she'd wear the evening pajamas he liked, the Halston num-

ber, which was a hand-painted three-piece, yellow petals on a silk chiffon and ran about nine-hundred fifty bucks retail. She'd be fresh from the beauty shop with black curls around her face and a little green eyeshadow. A good wife, and a good-looking woman still, thought Stutzman. His family had shaken their heads and told him you marry a girl with Italian blood, she'll go to fat, Lew. But Angela could stand up to any of them. So a little padding around the thighs and tummy, now. What was a fifty-two-year-old woman supposed to look like, a Las Vegas cutie? A chorus girl with pink feathers on her tits, she's going to stay home and fix supper for Stutzman? She could still get in a 12, which was more than you could say for Miss Stuck-Up.

She'd have a little drink ready and then a meal he'd be too tired to eat, but he'd take a few bites to please her. And then they'd go to bed and watch *The Tonight Show* and maybe something nice would happen. Or maybe it wouldn't. Sometimes the miles caught up with him the first night back.

He could never tell Angela, because she wouldn't understand. The best part of getting home wasn't Angela. It was just *getting* there. Peeling off your clothes and dropping in the hot tub and washing off the trip. How could you get

so dirty, just flying? You're not looking, they got people sneak around and put soot in your clothes? He'd tried to tell her once about that: "Look, you pack and get out to the airport and get on the plane, okay? Take a shower and a shave and you got your clothes all clean and packed and you get on the plane. So it goes down the runway and they decide to come back, maybe. A wheel's bad or something. You go six blocks on the runway and they come back and you get off and go home. Everything you got on, it's dirty. You need a shave, you smell like an animal in the zoo. Everything in the bag, you didn't even wear it, that's dirty too. Why? I don't know why. Maybe they got girls in a room somewhere, they put dirt in the ticket."

There was that, thought Stutzman, and the pockets. Start out with a wallet and a pencil and take a one-day and back, you got pockets that look like goiters. A million dollars in nickels hanging to your knees, you bought cigarettes and a Snickers. You got maybe a hundred matches from everywhere. A one-day from Dallas to Houston, you see a customer and come home, you got enough matches and change to fill a truck.

The plane banked and fell into clouds and Miss Stuck-Up said she was glad they'd all gotten to fly together and maybe they could do it

again sometime. You should get a pocket full of peelings, thought Stutzman.

People cluttered about the end of the carpeted tunnel, but Stutzman didn't look up. Nobody was waiting for him, and he moved quickly past them to baggage. He didn't look up even when he heard his name. Then he did look up, and there was Bernie Freed. Stutzman frowned at him like he'd never seen him before. "Bernie. What are you doing at the airport?"

Bernie laughed and pumped his hand. "The airport is where the planes come in. What I'm doing is waiting for Stutzman."

"What for?" A terrible thought crossed his mind. "Angela. Something's happened to Angela."

"Nothing has happened to Angela," Bernie assured him. They were making an island in the stream of traffic, and Bernie moved them to a wall.

"Something has happened," said Stutzman. "Don't tell me nothing has happened." Thirty years, he could read Bernie Freed.

"Okay. So something's happened." Bernie looked up at him. He had to look up to see Stutzman. Stutzman wasn't tall but Bernie was short. A short, jumpy little terrier in a blue blazer, hound's-tooth pants and white turtleneck. The pencil-thin mustache twitched

under water-blue eyes.

"I gotta ask a favor, Lew. Christ, you're gonna hate me. But I gotta ask."

"What?" Stutzman said warily, "you got to ask what?"

"It's a trip."

"A trip? What kind of a trip? You mean like flying? When?" He already knew when, because Bernie hadn't said when.

Bernie didn't answer. He slid back his cuff and darted a glance at his gold Piguet. "Look, we're shorta time. We better move while we talk." He grabbed Stutzman's elbow and guided him toward the escalator. He was looking at everything in the airport. He wasn't looking at Stutzman.

"Bernie. You're not looking at me. Just tell me what it is, okay? And look at me. Where are we going? I got bags back there."

"Lew, the bags are okay."

"How are they okay? Tell me. I'm not there and the bags are okay."

Bernie led him down the escalator into the hot air and through a glass door under the terminal. It was a small, concrete room where you could catch the boxy little Airtrans cars from one airline to another, when the system was working.

It wasn't getting any better and Stutzman didn't like it. "Bernie. Stop a minute. Just stop and talk to me."

Bernie looked at his watch again. Glass doors slid open and one of the cars clacked to a stop. Bernie pushed Stutzman in and the doors hissed together.

"Bernie —"

Bernie's mustache twitched. "Lew, it's Neuman."

Stutzman looked blank. "Neuman? So what about Neuman?"

"He's gone crazy or something." Bernie spread his hands in despair. "I don't know him anymore. Twenty years, I don't even *know* him. What happens to people?"

"I don't know what happens to people," Stutzman said patiently. "What's happened to Neuman?"

Bernie's eyes went hard. "He is killing me, is what. He's losing the line everywhere, and it'll take a hundred years to get it back. A hundred? A hundred fifty is closer. Neuman is fucking everything on the east coast. Models, buyers, secretaries — goddamn *poodles* he's fucking. Mostly, he is fucking me. Can you believe? He tries to screw the Saks buyer. Right in her own office. They can't get him *out* of there, he's crying." Bernie looked at the ceiling. "Crying. Can you believe it? Everybody's canceling. I call New York and nobody'll talk to me. Bloomingdale's doesn't know me. Bergdorf is maybe burning our line in the street."

"Neuman is fifty-seven," said

Stutzman. "He's got a family."

Bernie glared at him. "He's a hundred and two, what's that? He's killing me!"

The car bobbed to a halt and Bernie stopped talking. A girl got on. She was young, twenty or so, with long straight hair faded yellow in the sun. Small breasts and a lanky figure. Patched jeans and something Stutzman decided were shower clogs. She dropped a green backpack on the floor and took out a paperback and started reading. Stutzman saw the name on the front and made a face. Herman Hesse. Great. Now we got Nazi hippies flying around the country.

"What I got to do," Bernie was telling him, "is straighten this thing out or we're dead. You see where I am, right? I *hate* to do it to you, Lew. Honest to God. I know you been gone a couple weeks. I been on the road, I know how it is."

"Three."

"What?"

"Three weeks. I been gone three weeks. And why me, anyway, Bernie? I'm a salesman. Send a vice-president or something. Send Marvin or Harry." Go yourself, he didn't say.

"Lew." Bernie looked pained. "Marvin and Harry don't know from selling. I got to send someone they'll respect. They know you. You got a name in the business."

Stutzman turned in his seat and

looked right at him. "Bernie, where are we? Right now. Just tell me where we are right now."

Bernie looked bewildered.

"Lew. You know where we are."

"No, I mean it. What city? Where is this, Bernie? I want you to tell me."

"Lew. It's Dallas. You know where it is. What're you trying to do to me?"

"Dallas." Stutzman nodded.

"Okay, I am very pleased to hear that. It's a big load off my mind. Because you know what, Bernie? Sometimes I been out a week maybe and I'm sitting in a motel somewhere, I got to stop and try to figure where I am. I think maybe — okay, this is Atlanta, because it's Wednesday. Only maybe it's not. Maybe I got behind a day and it's Raleigh or Nashville or Charlotte or somewhere. If I watch the TV, I can wait until a program's over and maybe they'll give the town, you know? So I get home once in a while, and you know what? Nothing looks right. It don't even smell like a Holiday or a Ramada or anyplace I ever been. I look in the bathroom and I think, what kind of place is this? The glasses aren't wrapped. They don't even have a little paper thing over the pot — which is wrong anyway because the seat's white instead of black. I go around feeling pictures. They aren't screwed in the walls. Nothing's right. And you know

why? I'm *home* is why, and I feel like I broke in a house or something."

The girl looked up over her book at him. Stutzman came right out of his seat and shook a finger in her face. "Just get right back in your dirty book, Miss Dope Smoker," he shouted, "this doesn't concern you!" The girl shrugged and looked away.

"Jesus, Lew." Bernie shook his head. The car came to a stop and he led Stutzman out. "I never heard you talk like this before."

"Maybe I never did before."

"I feel like a son of a bitch."

"Good," said Stutzman, "that's something." At the top of the escalator he stopped. "So where am I going, Bernie? What am I supposed to do? You got the bags coming? Great. I'm leaving town, I got two bags full of dirty shirts and smelly underwear."

"Forget it." Bernie waved him off. He handed over a heavy envelope. "I got all the stuff here. Names, you know most of them. Tell 'em everything's gonna be fine; we're sorry about Neuman, the lousy bastard; we'll give discounts on top of discounts, whatever. Throw away your goddamn clothes. Get a whole fucking wardrobe. I don't care. *Fix* it, Lew. Okay? I'll never forget it."

"Okay, Bernie."

"No, I mean it." He clutched

Stutzman's elbow. "I'll make up for it."

"I got to call Angela. I don't know what the hell I'll tell her, but I got to say something."

He got an angry busy signal and waited a minute and called again. She was still on the phone. He waited and called again, then glumly set the phone back on its hook. He looked at his ticket to see where he was going. New York. On Braniff. Bernie was hopping around from one foot to the other by the gate, like he needed to pee. Stutzman stared morosely out the broad windows. Planes in Braniff's varied colors squatted around the big half loop. Wonderful. So I'll ride a yellow banana to New York. Or maybe an apple or a lettuce. He looked past the planes at the hot summer sky. "Listen, God," he said darkly, "I never said a bad thing about You anytime — so what's the big deal on Stutzman? I don't *need* this trip, and You know it. What I need is a hot bath and a bed. You could make him get someone else easy if You wanted to. You could do it now, I'm still at the airport."

Stutzman waited. Nothing happened.

"Okay. You're pissed off at Stutzman, I'm telling You something. You like it or not, Stutzman is plenty pissed off at You"

On the flight he took his attaché case into the cramped restroom and shaved and brushed his teeth and took his shirt off enough to spray under his arms. That didn't make the shirt clean or the underwear either. He had an extra pair of socks in the case but no underwear. He sat on the toilet and changed the socks. The old ones smelled awful. He hated to put them back in the case. He thought about it a minute and then did something he'd never done before. He wadded them up and tossed them in with the paper towels. That made him feel a lot better. Bernie Freed could spring for new socks. Bernie could spring for new everything. He would go to a place he knew in New York and buy wholesale and charge Bernie the retail price and maybe a little on top. Let him scream about it if he wanted to. He didn't like it, he could send one of his nephew vice-presidents to do his dirty work. That'd serve him right, too. He could see Marvin and Harry in Saks and Lord & Taylor and Jordan Marsh. Bernie'd be lucky if he didn't lose the whole east coast.

The more he thought about it, the madder he got. What the hell was he doing here? On another damn airplane to New York? He was a salesman and a good one. This year he'd pull in maybe sixty-five, seventy-thousand in commissions. It wasn't his job to clean up

after Bernie Freed. So if it wasn't, what was he doing here?

Someone knocked on the door. He muttered to himself and tossed his toothbrush and toothpaste back in the attaché and snapped it shut and opened the door. It was the hippie girl in the jeans: "Listen, you smoke up the place with heroin in there, I'll have you arrested," he told her.

"Fuck you," said the girl.

Stutzman spent two days in New York, mending the company's fences. Bernie hadn't exaggerated about Neuman. Neuman had clearly gone bananas. He had run up and down the eastern seaboard with his pants down. People in the business stopped him on the street. What's with Neuman, they wanted to know?

What could happen to such a man, Stutzman wondered? A man with a family and responsibilities? One minute he's okay, the next he's acting like a crazy. He felt sorry for Neuman and his family. But he felt even sorrier for himself. He was unhappy about being in New York, and to make matters worse, he caught a cold the first day in the city. No — when he stepped off the *plane* he got a cold. It was waiting for him there, ready to hop off someone else into his nose. And when he left for Philadelphia, he

took the cold with him. He took it to Baltimore and Washington. He took it to Hartford and Boston. When he talked to Angela she said he should get more sleep on the plane and keep his health up. In Richmond he thought about calling Bernie and telling him he could send someone else up to catch diseases. Who needed a trip to catch a cold? You could do it at home and save the money. Only Bernie would think it was a trick of some kind. He would be certain Stutzman had gotten the cold on purpose. Like you could go into Gimbel's maybe and buy a cold.

When he was on the road, Stutzman never counted days or cities. Through years of traveling he had developed the ability to ignore the little counter in his head that kept track of things like that. It was there, but he wouldn't look at it. Not until the last day in the last city. Then he would open his black appointment book and take out his pen and mark through all the cities and stores and dates at once. Somehow, that made it easier. Like the trip had only taken that long. Just the time it took to scratch them out.

On the last day in Miami he called Angela and told her he was coming, and then he sat on the edge of his bed at the motel and took out his book and crossed off the list. He crossed off New York and Philadel-

phia and Baltimore and Washington. He crossed off Hartford and Boston and Richmond. Charlotte and Roanoke and Miami. He crossed off American and Piedmont and Eastern. He closed the book and put it away. Then he took it out and looked at it again.

Now that's peculiar, he thought. In his head he quickly checked the places he'd been and the people he'd seen. Then he did it again and put the book down on the bed and got up and looked at himself in the mirror.

Something was wrong somewhere. For the life of him, he couldn't remember being in either Roanoke or Boston. All the others fell into place, but those two were a blank. He couldn't remember a store or a face. He sat and tried for a long time, but nothing happened. Finally, he turned back to his meeting notes and found them, along with where they'd gone to lunch and how much the taxis cost and where he spent the night. Seeing the notes pushed everything back in place again. But he couldn't forget it had *happened*. Was he a crazy, like Neuman? Maybe that's how it started. You forget where you've been, next minute you're chasing a poodle.

What it was was the goddamn trip, he told himself wearily. One right on top of the other with nothing in between. You couldn't push

a man forever. He had to stop, sometime. Well, Lew Stutzman sure as hell had a stop coming, and Bernie Freed and all his nephews wouldn't get him on the road again soon. He'd take the phone out and lock Angela in the bedroom. Maybe they'd do some things you weren't supposed to if you were over fifty and a respectable person. Why not? If hippies could do any kind of dirty stuff they wanted right out in front of everyone, couldn't a man be a crazy in his own bedroom?

Usually Stutzman stayed in his seat when he couldn't get a nonstop and the plane set down somewhere. In Atlanta, though, they were going to be on the ground for maybe half an hour while something got fixed — he didn't know what, and Miss Smartmouth the stewardess wasn't saying.

He was tired and stiff. If he got up, the time would pass. He took his attaché with him. The girls weren't supposed to touch anything, but who could know what they did when you weren't looking?

By the time he walked up the long tunnel and got cigarettes and a *Newsweek* it was time to get back. He showed his ticket at the gate and strapped himself in and buried his head in the *Newsweek*. There was a story on the economy, which was bad. Such a big surprise, thought Stutzman. Everything was

still in turmoil in the Middle East, God should curse the Arabs, and food was up again. He closed the magazine and stuffed it in the seat pocket and glanced out the window. The ground was dropping away and the light was off. He reached for a cigarette and found orange and blue Howard Johnson's matches in his pocket and opened the ashtray and lit a match. He looked at the match a minute and then blew it out. Now *that* was funny. He hadn't noticed it before, but the seat in front of him was the wrong color. It wasn't the way it *had* been before he got off the plane. How could that be? Maybe he was in the wrong seat. He looked up and across the aisle. That wasn't it, either. *All* the seats were the wrong color. The ceiling of the airplane was the wrong color. Stutzman leaned out and peered up the long aisle. His heart jumped up in his throat. It wasn't even the same kind of stewardess — the uniforms were different!

Stutzman moaned. He felt suddenly weak all over. For Christ's sake, he was on the *wrong* airplane! He'd gotten off and gotten on again on the wrong goddamn plane!

He felt like a complete idiot. How could you *do* a thing like that? He waved frantically until the girl saw him and came briskly down the aisle.

"Yes, sir?"

"Look," Stutzman cleared his throat, "I'm not a crazy or anything, so don't think something. This isn't a Delta, is it? I'm not on an airplane with a Delta."

The girl smiled. "This is Southern, sir. To St. Louis."

"*St. Louis!*" Stutzman was furious. "I'm not flying a Southern — I'm flying a Delta to Dallas!"

The smile didn't change. "May I see your ticket, sir?"

Stutzman fumbled through his coat, cursing to himself, and handed it to her. She looked at it, and then held it up and showed it to Stutzman. Stutzman was appalled. It didn't say Delta on the folder. It said Southern. She opened it up and took out the ticket.

"You're Mister —" she looked down, "— Stutzman?"

"I'm Stutzman, I'm Stutzman."

She closed the packet and handed it back to him. "Your ticket's in order, Mr. Stutzman."

"What do you mean in order!" shouted Stutzman.

"You *are* on the right plane, sir." She opened it up and showed it to him. "Atlanta. Southern to St. Louis."

Stutzman stared at the ticket. Was he going crazy? There was his name. Lew Stutzman. To St. Louis. There wasn't anything about Dallas.

"There's a mistake. I'm not

going to St. Louis. I got nothing to do in St. Louis."

"Sir, could you see our agent in St. Louis? I'm sure he can clear things up for you. I'm terribly sorry for the inconvenience." She gave him a look he didn't like and trotted back up the aisle.

Stutzman leaned back and tried to relax. How could such a thing happen? What had they done, switched tickets on him? When, though? The ticket was fine in Miami. Atlanta, then. When he got off the plane. Maybe he took the ticket out somewhere. When he got the *Newsweek* and the cigarettes. He tried to think. Maybe there was another Stutzman. Was the other Stutzman on his way back to Dallas? That didn't make any sense at all. The whole thing gave him a headache.

He lit a cigarette and tried to read the *Newsweek*. After he'd scanned the same paragraph half a dozen times, he wadded up the magazine and jammed it angrily into the seat pocket. Goddamn airlines. He was dead certain, now, what had made Neuman a crazy....

In St. Louis the man at Southern said he was sorry for whatever it was that had happened and directed him to Ozark. He got an Ozark to Dallas and waited for flight time and got in line at the gate. He wanted to phone Angela and tell

her what had happened, but he decided not to. Just get there. Just get on the goddamn plane and get home.

The man in front of him moved away, and Stutzman got out his ticket for the agent. The agent took it. Stutzman grabbed it back. The sign above the counter didn't say Ozark. It said TWA. What was he doing at TWA!

"Your ticket, sir?"

"No." Stutzman shook his head. "I'm in the wrong place." What was the *matter* with him? Was he really losing his mind — trying to get on the wrong plane *again*?

The agent took his ticket and smiled. "No, sir. Everything's fine." He tore out a page and picked up a boarding pass. "Smoking or no smoking?"

"Smoking," Stutzman said dully. He looked at the agent in horror. What was he saying that for? He wasn't even *going* on TWA! He jerked back the ticket and stepped out of line, peering down the long corridor for Ozark. There wasn't a sign anywhere. He'd have to go back to the terminal and work his way back and maybe miss the flight. Shit. He'd be stuck forever in St. Louis.

Stutzman put his ticket in his pocket and started back up the corridor. Only he didn't. He started back in his head, but nothing hap-

pened. He was thinking all the things you were supposed to think to get moving, but he didn't. He wanted to go. But he couldn't. Nothing worked. All he could do was stand there and look where he wanted to go.

Stutzman had never been so frightened in his life. His heart slammed painfully against his chest. He was hot all over. He could smell the sweat under his arms. I'm dying, he decided. God in Heaven, I'm having a coronary. I'm having a coronary right here in the terminal in St. Louis, and I don't even *know* anyone in St. Louis.

How could he do that, he wondered. Who ever had a coronary standing up? You fell on the floor and turned blue, maybe. You didn't freeze like a pillar of salt in an airport!

He tried to move again — and gave a big sigh of relief. Whatever it was went away, and he was all right again. His feet were moving like feet were supposed to. He was going.

— Only *where* was he going? He stared down helplessly, his heart beating fast again, as his traitorous legs turned him around and walked him past the counter and through the waiting room and onto the TWA that wasn't going to Dallas.

Stutzman sat rigid in his seat, afraid to move. He looked down at the dark landscape and back at his

ticket. How could it say that? It should read Stutzman to Dallas on Ozark — not Stutzman to Denver on TWA. Why was he going to Denver? What was happening to him? What had they *done* to him!

When they put the tray of food in his lap, he sat and looked at it until the girl took it away. When it was gone, he couldn't even remember what had been on it.

Stutzman knew he had to stay calm. Whatever it was, it was something he could handle. If he was having a breakdown, he'd see someone. There was no disgrace in it. You could get a problem in your head, without being a crazy.

The more he thought about it, though, the more it frightened him. He wanted a drink badly but settled for coffee. Right now, he couldn't afford to screw up his head any more than it was already.

At Denver he ran all the way down the terminal. He was out of breath and sweating all over. He tried to light a cigarette but his hands were shaking and he dropped the match. Okay, he told himself. Just calm down and take it easy, Stutzman. Just do it right this time and get home and get to bed. There were Braniff flights to Dallas every hour. He got a ticket and studied it carefully. It was fine. It was exactly like it was supposed to be. It didn't say Stutzman to somewhere he didn't want to go. It said

Stutzman on Braniff to Dallas. He walked back out to the planes, making sure it said Braniff where he turned. There was no line, and the man took one of his tickets and gave him a boarding pass, and he got in his seat and strapped himself in. The plane lumbered out to taxi, and he could see the lights blinking on the wing and hear the engine whining up the scale for takeoff. The plane howled down the runway, and the ground blurred away in streaks of light, and they were in the air. He lit a cigarette and looked at his ticket. It was a TWA again and it said Stutzman to San Francisco.

There was blinding sunshine on a blue ocean. Wind whipped the waves frothy white and tossed them angrily against a rocky coast. The plane banked sharply and skimmed in for a landing, tires squealing rubber on the hot runway. Stutzman stared wearily out the window. His head felt like a fuzzball. His legs ached and his body was a sack of rocks. Where was he? On the TWA? In San Francisco, or where? No. He remembered, now. He was off the TWA. The TWA was — what, yesterday? The day before? He wasn't sure which.

The plane taxied up to the terminal, and he saw the other planes sitting there. Fat and round, gleaming in the sun. The terminal said

Pacific Southwest and the planes were all painted pink and red and white. They said PSA and there were little smiles painted across their noses.

It came back to him a little at a time. San Francisco and Los Angeles and Hollywood/Burbank and San Diego and wherever. Up and down the coast. Hopping about like rabbits from one city to the other. And how long had that been? It was hard to think. Things happened — but it wasn't easy to say when. Like the watch in his head had stopped running. The whole thing was a terrible nightmare. It wasn't happening. Why were they *doing* this to him?

On the TWA from Denver, Stutzman had tried to talk to people. That had been the most frightening thing of all. It wasn't as if nobody would answer. They just didn't *hear* him right. He told the stewardess he had to get off. She brought him coffee. He pleaded with her. She brought him peanuts. He told a respectable-looking business man he was on the wrong plane and he had to get to Dallas and would he do something to help. "Fine, and you?" said the man.

What was Angela thinking, he wondered. She'd be worried sick. Would she try to do something? They could trace the tickets, maybe. Track him down and find him and make whoever was doing this

terrible thing let him go.

He looked down morosely at his suit. It was crumpled and saggy and wrinkled all over. It pulled up tight around his crotch, and his bottom was numb from sitting. He felt like a fat brown lettuce. His face was covered with a scraggly stubble. He smelled and his feet itched. He reached down under his socks and scratched. He could clean up, anyway, and maybe feel better. He still had the attaché with the toothbrush and the razor. He could, he thought angrily, if everyone would just get out of the bathroom.

Stutzman didn't get a chance to clean up until he was on the Canadian Pacific from San Francisco. He brushed his teeth and shaved and took off his clothes and washed all over as well as he could in the cramped little room. He looked at himself in the mirror. A gray, pudgy face with bloodshot eyes looked back at him. He wanted to cry. "Lew, you look like a dead person," Angela said in his head. "So maybe I am," he said back to her.

They landed at Vancouver and Calgary and Edmonton. They stopped at Winnipeg and Ottawa and Montreal. He took something to New York and went on to Chicago and got North Central to Madison and Green Bay and Milwaukee and La Crosse and Grand

Rapids. He learned to eat whenever they'd serve him after he got stuck on short hops for two or three days where there was nothing but peanuts.

He took American to Tucson and Phoenix and Las Vegas and even back to Dallas once. That was almost more than he could take. He was right there — and all he could do was go wherever his legs would take him. Angela! Angela!

He went to Seattle and Portland and Anchorage and Fairbanks...

Des Moines and Detroit and Memphis and Wichita...

Nashville and Pittsburgh and Dayton and Kansas City...

He flew Frontier and Capital and Southwest and National...

Northwest and Continental and Eastern and United...

He flew airlines he'd never heard of before.

Even though Stutzman missed a meal now and then, he was putting on weight. He couldn't get his pants together anymore. His shirt wouldn't button. All he ever did was sit in the cramped economy seats and eat. There were sores on his thighs and buttocks, now. When he took his standup baths, he cleaned them off as best he could, but they burned worse than ever the minute he sat down again.

He used the toothpaste sparingly, but it finally ran out. He started

using salt he took from the meal trays. The deodorant was gone. There was still a good blade left, but he wouldn't let himself use it. He kept scratching away with the dull ones, tearing and scraping and making himself bleed. He stubbornly resisted the new blade. It was somehow a symbol of normalcy. Once the blade was gone, Stutzman was certain something terrible would happen.

Washing out the socks and underwear wasn't so bad, except he couldn't leave them out anywhere and they never quite got dry in the attaché. There was nothing to do about the shirt and the suit. They both smelled like a cat box, but after a while he didn't notice.

He ran out of cigarettes the second day and started robbing ashtrays. Since he always used credit cards and traveler's checks, he only had about twelve dollars cash. He spent it all on drinks, and when it was gone, he watched longingly as his fellow passengers downed bourbons and Scotches and vodkas and beers. Sometimes a passenger would leave the little toy bottles in a seat pocket, and he'd dig them out later and get maybe a drop or two. He was ashamed and embarrassed to do this, but he missed having a drink. It was something. There wasn't much else.

Sometimes on a long night

flight, Stutzman sat and stared out the little window and wondered why it had all happened to him. Who was doing this terrible thing? What had *he* ever done to anyone? A family man and a responsible person who minds his own business. A taxpayer and a citizen. So who?

He had a good idea who. It almost had to be God. Who else could handle such a thing? It took a big organization and a lot of tricky business. Like making feet go where they shouldn't and messing around with people's tickets.

Stutzman didn't want to believe it was God. If it was God, he was in for it. You could deal with almost anybody better than Him. Bernie Freed who thinks he knows everything, okay. A Bernie Freed you can handle. A God, though, what're you going to do? A God is a lot cagier than a Bernie Freed.

"This is something we can talk about?" Stutzman asked the dark window. "Whatever it is, it's got to be something we can talk about. There's nothing people can't work out, they sit down and talk together. There's been a misunderstanding, we can do something."

Stutzman paused a moment, considering. He dug around in the ashtray and found a butt that was mostly filter.

"Look, no offense —" he said, "you don't mind me saying, there's plenty You could be doing besides

fooling around with Stutzman. So who's Stutzman, a Hitler? Does Stutzman chase around after buyers and poodle dogs? Maybe You already know it, I'm not telling anything new. Bernie Freed cheats like a dog on his taxes. Also, he's got a *shiksa* girlfriend. The one sits in the corner in accounting? You can't miss her, she's got tits out to here."

It wasn't right, thought Stutzman. Bernie was back in Dallas with his home and his gold Piguet watch and the girlfriend with the tits, and Lew Stutzman was flying around like a crazy with no toothpaste. It didn't make sense. What had *he* done so terrible? God could be giving Arabs the clap or something. Why all the trouble with Stutzman?

It might be something that had happened a long time ago, he decided. Something he'd forgotten. That was the thing with God. He could hold a grudge forever. You could read about it in the *Torah*. One little thing. Pow!

"Listen, it's not the business with Marty Shuler's daughter, is it? That's forty years ago! You go back to that, it's only fair You get Levitch and Greenwaldt, too. I took her out once, maybe twice. She was happy to go, that counts for something."

Other things came back to him when he started thinking. Little

things. Okay, a couple of mediums. So who's perfect? The trouble with God was you couldn't tell. He was picky about some things and some things He wasn't.

"Sure," Stutzman said aloud once, "it's easy enough for You. You don't have to go out and sell in a bad season when nobody's buying. Try that sometime You got nothing to do!"

Stutzman looked at movies when there was one on the flight until he'd seen most of them twice. He read magazines until his eyes burned. He read *Time* and *Newsweek* and *Sports Illustrated* and the *Reader's Digest*. He read *People* and *Business Week* and *The National Geographic*. He even read things he couldn't stand like *Vogue* and *Ms.* and *Glamour*. There were two things he didn't read. He didn't read magazines that ran pictures of naked girls because it made him feel bad. After a while, he didn't read newspapers, either. Newspapers were terrible reminders of the passage of time. Tormenting calendars that scratched off the slow days of his long trip to nowhere. It was better not to know. He couldn't bear to think about it.

As it was, the days and nights seemed to blur and flow together like two heavy syrups, one never quite becoming the other

Stutzman didn't imagine it could get any worse, until it did. He wasn't sure how long it was before he realized he wasn't on domestic flights anymore. There were long, endless journeys from New York to Paris ...

From London to Los Angeles...

From Frankfurt to Capetown to Dar es Salaam...

From Karachi and Delhi to Osaka and Seattle....

There were strange butts in his ashtrays. Food he didn't like and magazines he couldn't read and people he couldn't understand.

He flew Air France and Alaska and Alitalia...

El Al and Lufthansa and Varig...

Icelandic, Sabena and Finnair...

Mexicana, Garuda and Qantas.

"It was the sales meeting in Tahoe, maybe?" he asked God. "One weekend — You're going to make a big thing out of that?"

He couldn't eat. But he couldn't not eat, either. A deadly cycle began: dreary, constipated days followed by awesome watery nights. His stomach cried out against breakfast in Bangkok, lunch in Zagreb and dinner in Kinshasa. He threw up Gazpacho, Schnitzel and Shad. Rumaki, Seviche and Rabat Loukoum. He had cold chills and hot flashes. For a while, he was too

weak to get from his seat to the john. The terrible bedsores got worse. He itched all over. He didn't even bother about the underwear and the-socks anymore. It was too much trouble and he didn't care. If he smelled, he smelled. They didn't like it, they could kick him off the plane.

"So what is it," he cried, "cheating Marty Engel at poker? Eight dollars, I got to fly forever for *that*?"

For some time, God hadn't even bothered with the wrong-ticket business. He got on, he got off. The feet knew where to go, if Stutzman didn't. Sometimes the man didn't look at his ticket. Sometimes he couldn't even remember changing planes. One flight flowed into another, like the days and the nights.

He quit trying to talk to people. Whatever he said, nobody listened. He had a secret horror that they couldn't even see him anymore. A smelly, invisible Stutzman. God could see him. But could anyone else? There was a way to find out. He could talk to someone. If they answered, he was there. He didn't even think about trying. If it was true, he didn't want to know.

The morning the sun came up over somewhere and burned into his eyes and clear through the back

of his soul, he knew why he'd saved the last good blade. There was no fear or sorrow in the knowledge. It was like the moment before love-making. The bouquet of a good wine. It was a beautiful and perfect thing. Stutzman didn't hesitate a minute. When it came to him, he was ready. Ready? He couldn't wait to get started.

In the tiny john he crouched on the toilet and took off his coat and rolled up his sleeve. Before he started, he let himself think a moment. About Angela. Only a moment. Any more and he knew he might not do it. It was the only thing that could stop him. She flickered into his consciousness, a little wallet picture, and then she was gone.

The blade was cold in his fingers. Like a melting sliver of ice. Sweat stung his eyes and he closed them hard and shut his mind and sliced quick and deep across his wrist. Stutzman went rigid with fear. The blade didn't hurt, but he felt the horror of its passage in his heart.

It had all happened so fast, the deed coming swiftly on the thought. He hadn't considered what might come after. In the back of his mind somewhere there was a vague projection of peace and darkness and clean boxer shorts. In the picture, there was nothing in between. In actuality, there was much more

than that — a long interval of *living* he hadn't counted on. Stutzman was frightened. Death was one thing. Dying was something else again!

He was angry and disgusted. What was he supposed to do now? How would it feel? Would it hurt? Would he just get weaker until he passed out?

So far, it didn't feel like anything. Okay. So what's the matter with that?

He told himself he'd be all right. He could do it. Just sit still and let it happen. Just keep your eyes closed and *don't look*. He knew what it would look like and it was something he didn't want to see. Ever. Jesus — how long had he been *in* here? There'd be blood over everything. It would look awful.

He promised himself all he'd do was open his eyes a *little*. Just enough to let the gray in. Not any more than that. The best thing to do would be start high, and work down. That way, you could stop just before you got to something you didn't want to see. You'd see the edge of it first and you could quit.

He saw the top of the wall. The edge of the sink and part of the door. A piece of his leg. A little spot of white that was the end of a finger. Hold it. Damn, there ought to be something awful by now. Slow, slow. A little further but not much —

Stutzman opened his eyes all the way and stared. *Nothing!* Not even a scratch! How could that be? He picked up the blade and ran it carefully over his finger. Again, harder. Finally, he slashed his palm desperately a dozen times as hard as he could. A terrible cry stuck in his throat, and he dropped the blade and tore at his face with his hands. Hot tears ran down his cheeks. He should have known. He might have guessed God wouldn't let him do it. It was just the kind of dirty trick He'd come up with

Getting off the foreign run helped for a while. Stutzman was even glad to see *Ms.* and *Popular Science*. He welcomed the toy bags of salt and pepper, and even the seventy-four ways the airlines cooked chicken looked good again.

He flew to Chicago and Des Moines and Corpus Christi...

Omaha and Ft. Smith and Cedar Rapids...

Tulsa and Knoxville and Fargo and St. Petersburg.

For a time, there was a remote sense of day/night/day/night, like the quick frames of a movie flicking by. A numbing rhythm at best, but at least it held the dull hint of one something following another. Then, the beats and flickers blurred into a single, nearly inaudible hum, and for Stutzman there was neither yesterday nor tomorrow, only the terri-

ble, frozen barb of now lost in the temporal wilderness

He flew to Wichita and Albuquerque and Amarillo...

Austin and Sioux City and St. Paul...

Reno and Bismarck and Boise.

Sometimes he remembered to take off his suit in the tiny washroom and clean himself a little, but even that seemed to take a great effort of will, more than he had to give. He forgot things like that. Or didn't bother when they came to mind. It had been a long time since he'd shaved. Right after God tricked him, he threw the good blade away. A thing like that, a man couldn't put to his face.

One night when his window looked far down on the lights of somewhere, the dreary curtain parted in his mind, and in a rare moment of clarity he remembered things. Things beyond the dull animal sense of simply being a Stutzman, who was hungry and tired sometimes and had a cramp in his foot. He remembered Angela and cobwebs and wine. Grass and pillows and bathtubs. He remembered the hippie girl with the yellow hair and the lady peeling oranges and Neuman's buyers and poodle dogs. He remembered everything there was to remember about Bernie Freed. The blazer and the hound's-tooth pants and the gold Piguët

watch and the mustache that twitched. And in that moment he remembered something else, a thing that had happened right in the airport with Bernie he hadn't remembered before.

"That's the thing, maybe?" he asked God. "A thing like that? Listen, a person gets mad, he says things. It's something you say, you don't mean it like it sounds. Anyway, it's Bernie I'm pissed at, not You. I meant Bernie, I should've said Bernie. I'm sorry. You got nothing to do with it. The whole thing's a mistake. It's something'll never happen again, you got Stutzman's word on it."

Stutzman waited, but nothing happened. Maybe it wasn't that at all. Maybe it really was the business with Marty Shuler's daughter and God wouldn't admit it. "I'm supposed to know, You won't talk to me? How can you get along with someone, the someone won't sit down and talk? It's a good thing You got Your own business," Stutzman shouted, "You'd sure as hell never make it working for somebody else!"

He flew to Shreveport and Day-ton and New Orleans...

Clearwater and Brownsville and Hartford...

Little Rock and Augusta and Wheeling.

In the beginning he'd put on

extra weight, eating rich food and sitting in his seat and doing nothing. Now he hardly ate at all. He wasn't hungry anymore. Trays passed over his lap uneaten, an endless train of plastic and glass and chicken and peas and tarts and butters and coffees.

He didn't read anymore.

Or dig for butts in the ashtrays.

He sat in his seat and looked at nothing, encasing the essence of Stutzman.

He slept more and more, the sleeping and the waking subtly brushing together, until it was hard to tell one from another.

"I still look like a dead person, Angela," he said aloud or dreamed, "but you should be happy — I'm sleeping on the airplane."

He was dimly aware of rain slapping hard against the window. Dirty clouds swept by in quick streaks of gray. The plane hit heavy air and jolted him awake. Stutzman opened bleary eyes and saw the trailing edge of the wing groan down in place for a landing. He felt the wheels shudder from their nests and bite air. He leaned back again and closed his eyes

and opened them wide. The plane gave a crazy little tilt. Stutzman's head slammed the window. The belly hit concrete and hot metal howled. The wing showered sparks and clutched earth, clipping

bright blue lights like a lawnmower.

From the moment the plane touched ground until the end, only seven quick seconds went by. But Stutzman saw it all, in an instant replay of horror — slow dark honey creeping down a pancake forever.

He saw a gray wing crumple and tear like leftover foil....

He saw the big engine, still whining and angry, pull gently from its place and tumble gracefully through First Class and out the other side....

He saw the bright white wall of fire roll back to swallow Economy and watched the pale-eyed surfers swim against it....

And then in an instant they were gone. He saw dark clouds and felt cold rain on his face. He was alone. No sound, no sight, no touch, no nothing.

In the instant he knew what had happened and understood that he would die in the tiny slice of a second, Stutzman felt a great and terrible fear. Then, a wonderful sense of joy and happiness brushed the fear away, and he saw that God had forgiven him and let him off the hook. No more bedsores and dirty underwear. No more seat belts and peanuts and paper napkins. And in that fragment of a moment before nothing, Stutzman returned the favor and forgave God.

"Jesus Christ!"

Okay, so I'm wrong. You got a son. Whatever.

"C'mere. This one's alive!"

Alive? What's with alive?

White faces and white coats.
White arms lifting and pulling and
a white ambulance door and a siren

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shrieking red and white and blue.

"Where am I?" said Stutzman.

"You're okay, mister. Got a little burn on your arm is all, you're gonna be okay."

Stutzman stared at him. "I got out? I'm alive? A thing like *that*, nobody's hurt?"

The white face went whiter. "*Hurt?* Shit, man, there ain't nobody *whole* back there! Maybe a hundred fifty poor fuckers all —"

"Hey, he don't want to hear all that," said the other face.

Me, he thought wonderously, just me? Everybody dead, and Stutzman alive? He understood, then. God was sorry for what he'd done. He'd spared Stutzman. It was over. All over and he could see Angela. He could get a drink and take a bath and kick the shit out of Bernie Freed. He could get a little

furniture store, maybe a dress shop. You got to go somewhere, you get a bus or a taxi.

"You okay?" said the face.

"I'm okay."

"Can you sit up?"

"I can sit."

The doors opened, and the man helped him out, and he could hear the big engines idling and see the tail of the plane high against the dark and the moisture pebbling its skin. The stewardess got his ticket from his coat and looked at it and smiled, and from the yellow light in the door he could hear the other girl telling everyone how federal regulations require that your seat back and tray table be upright for takeoff and landing and that should the cabin become depressurized oxygen masks would automa

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Paul Dellinger tells us that he "graduated from Roanoke College, Va., in 1960; spent the next three years in the Army, being assigned during the last two to the Information Office at West Point and eventually as editor of its post newspaper, which is where I got the background for this story." Mr. Dellinger is now a newspaper reporter for The Roanoke Times and has sold fiction to Fantastic and other magazines.

The Werewolf of West Point

by PAUL DELLINGER

If Maria Ouspenskaya had been born anywhere but in Russia, I wouldn't be telling you any of this. Most of the movies in which the stately white-haired actress appeared were before my time, but I caught some on TV ranging from *Dr. Ehrlich's Magic Bullet* to *Tarzan and the Amazons*. As far as I was concerned, though, her most memorable role was the old gypsy woman Maleva, who kept trying to cure Lon Chaney, Jr., of lycanthropy in *The Wolf Man* and *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man*. And that was even before I came face to face with him myself — not Chaney, but the real thing.

The U. S. Military Academy at West Point, New York, might seem an unlikely setting for such an encounter, unless perhaps you've been there during the dead of winter and seen its gray Gothic architecture looming in silhouette against a mist rising off the Hudson

River. That's how it looked the night I was walking across the reservation back to the enlisted men's barracks, after my usual frustrating few minutes with the beautiful Bingo Barbetta of the incomparable face and the impossible figure.

I suppose any guy who lets himself flip for a West Point cadet deserves what he gets (which isn't much, considering corps regulations about public displays of affection), but Bingo was something special. She'd come in with the more than 100 Bicentennial broads who, after 174 years of male exclusivity, broke the academy's sex barrier, and she was one of the few who'd made it through their plebe year. Now she was less than a year away from graduation and a second lieutenant's commission, and what could be sillier than a lowly Specialist-4 like myself lusting after her?

I'll tell you what could be sillier — *not* lusting after her, given the

vaguest encouragement and the fact that the Mr. America who'd had strings on her was no longer in a position to pull them. It had been nearly six months now since his car had plunged off the Storm King Highway after he'd visited her at the academy one weekend. The news accounts indicated he might have survived the crash if he hadn't been slashed to ribbons by the shattered windshield — which struck me as weird, since the reports also mentioned that his seat belt was fastened. The incident came closer to breaking Bingo than all the previous hazing and discipline had done — I knew, because the press made a big thing of it, and I was assigned from the post information office as liaison between Bingo and the outside media — but she had toughed it out.

In the process, I learned all kinds of intimate things about her, ranging from how she got her name (from a superstitious father who'd won a bingo prize the night before she was born) to the first thing she did every morning when she popped out of bed (twenty-five deep knee bends — and her legs were in great shape). I guess I became a kind of big brother figure to her. At least she confided quite a bit to me that I never passed on to any reporter. But, as I came to know her better, my feelings for her became anything but brotherly.

The funny thing was I'd started out hating the assignment, even if the other guys at the enlisted men's barracks did turn green at the idea of me spending working hours with the only cadet they'd willingly follow into battle or anywhere else. I had joined the army because I'd run out of funds during my second year in college, and the job market being what it was, three years in the service seemed an easy enough way of saving up to finance the other two years. I had not joined because of any infatuation with the regimented military life and I felt I had little in common with those making a career of it — especially a spit and polish cadet, whether male or female.

But Bingo surprised me. I'd expected to meet a gung-ho athletic pluperfect female cadet, and she turned out to be a girl. Gung-ho perhaps, athletic certainly, and as near perfect a female physical specimen as you could imagine under those short blond curls, but she also possessed the rare talent of making whomever she spoke with seem the most important part of the conversation. Within five minutes, I would have voted for her for President. I would also have sworn that she had a gift for mind reading.

"I'm sorry for being thrust on you this way," she said after Major Cropp had performed the introductions and left us alone in the infor-

mation office's tiny interview room. "It shouldn't last too long. The tabloids don't generally stay with a particular subject more than a week."

Her candor and her control of the situation took me by surprise, and we were soon calling each other "Norm" and "Bingo" instead of "Specialist Holton" and "Cadet Barbetta." As she'd predicted, the public interest in her died out when it became apparent she wasn't going to resign, or go to pieces, or do anything other than what she'd been doing all along — preparing to become one of the first female West Point graduates. If I learned nothing else about her, I soon found that she had a passion for doing things that had never been done before. She'd have probably tried to become the first woman astronaut if the Russians hadn't already orbited one of their own.

I hated to admit it, but she was a credit to the corps.

It didn't take Major Cropp long to tumble to my change of heart regarding the assignment, and it took even less time for him to terminate it. Charles Chandler Cropp — or "Mad Dog Charlie," as he was affectionately known to the other enlisted men at the information office — was not about to allow any kind of social fraternization between a future second looey and a dogface, especially when the dogface was

me. He and I had constant disagreements regarding such things as the shininess of my shoes, the frequency of my haircuts and similar trifles, although I always had the last word: "Yes, sir."

Most of my work at the office involved the editing of the post newspaper, the *Pointer View* — or *Pointless View*, as most of us more aptly referred to it (Mad Dog Charlie had rapidly changed my attitude of "all the news that's fit to print" to "all the news that's been cleared") — and it was not unusual for me to be working nights on it when company pleasantries like KP took up one of my days. Like yesterday, in fact, which was why I was alone in the office last night laying out the week's issue for the printers in nearby Newburgh. At least I'd thought I was alone.

"Specialist Holton!"

I almost snapped to attention before I realized it wasn't an officer but a little old man in civilian clothes. He had white hair sticking out in tufts on either side of his cherubic face and wore rimless spectacles that somehow went with his old-fashioned dark suit.

I'd thought I locked the information office door, the key being one of the dubious benefits of my occasional extra duty hours, but I'd had a hard day and decided I must have forgotten. Only later did I wonder how he knew my name.

"Uh — can I help you, sir?" Always be courteous to visitors, we were told — even though they didn't normally pop up in the middle of the night.

"I hope I can help you, young man," he replied, beaming at me. "I've been seeking you for some time now. My name is Mr. Lazarus, and I have finally satisfied myself that you are the individual who will be the decisive factor in an impending engagement here between good and evil. There are things you must know, in order to prepare yourself for the challenge."

We got a lot of weird tourist types at the office during the day, and, as far as I knew, none of them had ever been violent. Still, I found myself wishing for a knock on the door. Sometimes Ralph Slade, a Vietnam vet who'd made something of a reputation for himself carving up the enemy on night missions over there before being assigned here to an MP detachment, would drop by for coffee when he saw the office lights through the windows. He was quite a fan of Cadet Baretta, as was I by now. Tonight, of course, he was nowhere around.

"Tomorrow will be the first night of the full moon," my smiling visitor went on. "You must survive that to reach the critical time when you can restore things to their natural balance here."

Well, I had nothing against sur-

living. But I couldn't see what this old bird had to do with it.

"Rely on hard water and soft silver for your defense," he said, as though the admonition actually made sense. "And stay in the company of at least two persons while the moon is full."

"Two?" I'd pondered for days over some excuse to see Bingo again and finally came up with collecting all the newspaper clippings that had been published about her in recent weeks. I was supposed to deliver them to her tomorrow evening, and I definitely wanted no third party along.

But Mr. Lazarus was adamant. "One might be the very entity that seeks to destroy you," he said. "For your own sake and that of many other people, you must be guided by me."

With that, he turned and seemed almost to glide out to the hallway leading to the office entrance. "Wait," I called. "Why not just tell me who —?"

"You would not believe me," his voice floated back. "In any case, if you knew, you might not react as you must to rid the world of this anomaly. Good night, young man."

I was out of my chair after him in seconds, but somehow he'd already slipped out. I grabbed the doorknob and got another shock. The door was locked.

By the time I'd concluded my

all-too-brief chat with Bingo the next night, I'd about decided the old man was something I'd dreamed in some sort of post-KP fog. Even when I noticed the full moon in a shimmering outline through the wintry mists, I wasn't worried about his warning. Not until I heard crunching sounds in the frozen snow behind me

I turned and looked, but could see nothing through the trees. As far as I could tell, I was the only person in this area of the military reservation. But I could hear that animal-like presence shambling along in my wake, and I seemed to hear the voice of Mr. Lazarus again: *Stay in the company of at least two persons while the moon is full.*

Even now I can think of no logical reason for it, but I started to run. I sprinted toward the cadet area hoping for some MP or officer to appear and inform me it was off limits to enlisted personnel. No such luck. And I could hear the whatever-it-was behind me changing direction to cut me off. So I skidded to a stop, jumped off the snow-covered sidewalk and began rolling head over heels down the long embankment toward the West Point dock on the frozen river.

I didn't hesitate when I hit bottom, but got a running start and leaped off the edge. The thin ice broke under the impact of my feet

and the cold shock of plunging into the water almost paralyzed me. As I thrashed around trying to keep my water-soaked army overcoat from dragging me under, I caught my first glimpse of what had driven me in.

Its silhouette was manlike — I thought it even wore a uniform like my own — but it was crouched at an unnatural angle. I struck out farther from shore, breaking the ice ahead of me with gloved fists, afraid it might jump in after me despite its apparent hesitation.

I was right.

When I saw it spring, I no longer thought of it as human. It landed so lightly that the ice didn't even crack and shuffled in my direction on all fours, more beast than man, its shadowy face upraised as though sniffing for my scent. A man who raised bloodhounds once told me that water didn't throw off his animals, as folks thought, because some scent would remain in the air over it for a time. The memory was not encouraging.

I seemed to hear Mr. Lazarus' voice again: *Rely on hard water and soft silver for your defense ... Hard water — ice!* The thing might still track me above the ice, but how about under it?

My uniform hat somehow had stayed with me. I gripped it by the visor and scaled it off to one side.

Let the beast follow that if it was using its nose. Then I took a deep breath and stopped fighting the pull of the icy water.

Blindly, I struck out through the inky blackness toward what I hoped was the dock. I breast-stroked and kicked until my lungs seemed ready to burst, then deliberately hung on a few more seconds before making for the surface.

I had visions of coming up face-to-face with my pursuer, and what happened was almost as bad. I didn't come up at all. My head touched the ice and it didn't give when I pushed at it.

Despite my aching chest, I let myself sink far enough to get up some small speed as I kicked up again. This time the ice gave and my head broke through into open air. I inhaled as quietly as I could, as I searched for my adversary. Sure enough, it had taken my bait. I could barely spot its shadowy form, close to the ice, slinking in the direction I'd thrown my hat.

The dock lay a few yards away. As much as I wanted to make a mad scramble for it, I forced myself to go slowly and quietly. It seemed an eternity before I eased myself out of the water and, trembling both from the chill and a primitive, mindless fear I couldn't explain, began crawling back up toward the sidewalk.

The rest is still vague in my

mind, but somehow I made it back up, keeping even lower than during basic training when we crawled under live machine-gun bullets. I must have run all the way back to the barracks then. I do recall passing under one of the statues of some general on horseback — a male horse, judging by where some visiting navy athletic team had painted part of the underside red.

Naturally the other guys had questions about my waterlogged appearance. But it took a good fifteen minutes under a hot shower before I'd unthawed enough to talk, and by then their interest had shifted to other topics. I don't know what I'd have told them, anyway. "You see, fellows, I heard this noise and it scared me so much I jumped into the river ..." Besides, none of them had to be too bright to detect my recent fascination with Cadet Barbetta, crazy and hopeless as it was. Nothing I did in that condition would have surprised them too much.

I didn't sleep much that night, even after lights out at ten o'clock. I kept seeing weird animal shapes in the shadows at the windows, or thought I did.

Finally, utter exhaustion forced me to close my eyes and decide to hell with it; if they got me, they got me. It seemed like I had just dozed off when Sergeant Schwartz switched on the lights and began bellow-

ing his early morning encouragement for our squadroom to rise and shine.

I almost fell face-down into the scrambled eggs in the mess hall but managed a few bites before dragging myself across the reservation to the information office. Mad Dog Charlie greeted me before I even got to my desk.

"You're wearing the overseas cap, Specialist Holton," he informed me, standing straight with his hands held stiffly behind his back. "Don't tell me you've forgotten that the uniform hat — not the cap — is the proper military attire for winter. Or did you think it was spring outside?"

Major Cropp was very strict about uniforms. He kept a spare one down the hall in the officers' toilet, in case he lost a crease in the one he was wearing.

"No excuse, sir," I said, giving the only reply he'd accept without argument. "I'll buy a new hat at the PX this morning, sir."

"Not necessary, Holton," he snapped, whipping one hand out from behind him. It held a damp-looking, rather droopy hat with my name and service number in the band. "But perhaps you could use a bit more extra duty back at the company until you learn to care for your property. Eh?"

"Right," I agreed, accepting the hat and starting toward the

door, too weary to even protest.

"Unfortunately, we can't spare you today. A group of cadets from a military school in Spain will present a silver medallion bearing their institution's coat of arms to the museum here at noon. I want you to get a publicity release out on it. Line up someone from the photo lab to take a picture of the presentation. But see if you can't come up with something other than the stock presentation shot, won't you, Holton?"

Normally, I'd never have thought of it. I mean, the extent of my revolt against the army heretofore had been occasionally lining up the letters FTA in a triple headline. But groggy as I was, the idea that had germinated in the back of my mind seemed inspiring.

I can't remember what I told the officer who answered the telephone in the cadet commandant's office, except that I used Major Cropp's name in making my request to have Cadet Barbetta present for the picture taking. After all, Mad Dog Charlie had wanted something different to send out to the news media, hadn't he? And I would get to see Bingo again, even if only momentarily and in a crowd.

The Spanish cadets could barely restrain themselves when they met Bingo. Their squad leader went so far as to click his heels together and kiss her hand. It made a

lovely shot and was not only carried by the New York papers where we sent it but picked up by the wire services as well. But that's another story. So far as I know, the medalion being presented to the museum barely got mentioned at all. So Major Cropp didn't get much out of it.

All I got out of it was a warm smile and a whispered hello from Bingo, but that was the most I'd hoped for. Cadets, male and female, were forbidden to show any public display of affection, even to the extent of holding hands. What went on between cadets and their dates on the enforced seclusion of Flirtation Walk might be open to speculation, but I doubted if I'd ever find out firsthand.

I got a whisper of a different sort from Ralph Slade, one of the MPs on duty at the museum that day. "You crazy bastard!" he hissed at me. "You'll be picking up cigarette butts from now 'til doomsday if Cropp finds out you rung her n on this thing."

"Might as well be for a sheep as a lamb, then," I replied with what, in my numb euphoria, must have been an idiotic grin. "If you'll excuse us, gentlemen," I said to the rest of the group, "I'm supposed to scort Cadet Barbeta back to her lasses now"

The visiting squad leader held onto Bingo's hand until the transla-

tion finally got through to him. Or maybe it was Ralph's glare that prompted him to let go. In any case, Bingo and I shared a private conversation — as private as it could be, considering it was taking place while walking across one of the nation's favorite tourist attractions — for the first time in weeks. I'm still not sure what I said. My experience of the previous night had me pretty well out of it, even then. But it must have been something close to what I'd been wanting to say for some time because Bingo's response shocked me back to normal consciousness.

"I've felt the same way for some time, Norm," she replied softly, as we marched through a throng of visiting Boy Scouts along the sidewalk. "I thought at first it was because you were the first half-decent male I met after — after what happened before. When I finally realized it was more than that, I kept quiet because I knew you weren't too gung-ho about the military. And I'm going to be part of that scene for a few years after graduation, at least."

"If all the officers were like you, I could love the military," I assured her. "In fact — good afternoon, sir!" I said in unison with Bingo as we saluted a passing colonel. "In fact —"

But I never did get it out. I became aware of running footsteps

behind us and turned with a shaky sense of *deja vu* expecting a repeat of last night. But it was only Ralph.

"I warned you, Norm. Major Cropp got to the museum a couple minutes after you left. He wants you at the office."

I grinned at him. "It was worth it," I said with a sidelong glance at Bingo. "Besides, he'll come around when he sees what good play his presentation story gets in the media, with Bingo in it."

"That's not what he's mad about, Norm. You know that spare uniform he keeps at the office, in case he loses a crease or something during the day? Well, he happened to check it after lunch and found that someone had apparently given it a good soaking in a shower and hung it back up, dripping wet. And he seems to think you did it."

"That's crazy! Why should I?"

Ralph spread his hands in apparent bewilderment. "I don't know. But it seems like you've been doing crazy things all day, so what's one more?"

He had a point. Reluctantly, I left him and Bingo and headed back to the information office. I could see the logic of Cropp's reasoning, in a way. It was no secret that I had an Ensign Pulverish attitude toward him. And I had a key to the office and could have gotten to his precious uniform during the night —

I stopped in my tracks. It suddenly occurred to me to wonder how Cropp got hold of my hat. Had it been turned in as lost, because of my name in it? Or had he come by it another way altogether?

"Things are seldom what they seem, Specialist Holton," an all-too-familiar voice called to me. "You were sufficiently resourceful to escape with your life last night. But your enemy knows you, well enough to catch you off-guard in close proximity."

It was that weird little old man, Mr. Lazarus, leaning casually against the old artillery piece that still guarded against British warships coming up the Hudson. "Hey!" I said. "If you can tell me anything about last night —"

"Surely, my boy, you know what that was by now. After all, it's as new to me as it is to you. I played a small role in — pardon the expression — unearthing a vampire in an affair several years back, but this is my first dealing with a werewolf."

"A what?" The old boy was off his rocker, after all. I decided. And yet, even as the thought flashed across my mind, I believed he spoke the truth. "You mean like in those old horror movies?"

He beamed at me, like a professor whose student has finally managed a correct answer. "I might also refer you to Guy Endore's novel, *The Werewolf of Paris*. O

the *loup-garou* of ancient Europe, the Norse berserkers, the Roman skin-changers, or turncoats as they were called. Science has no answer for such as these, and so it ignores them. Which is why someone like myself becomes necessary, you see."

All I saw was that he and Maria Ouspenskaya would have made a good pair. I started to tell him so.

"Ah, yes, the charming Russian lady who appeared in those motion pictures you mentioned. I hope you will remember other facets of the legend as well, when the time comes."

"Russian? I thought she was Hungarian," I said.

"You are probably thinking of Bela Lugosi," he said, adjusting his rimless spectacles. "You had best keep your mind attuned to the distaff side of this affair. I seem to perceive that a woman is involved here, too. Remember what I told you to rely upon for your defense."

With that, he stepped around to the other side of the artillery piece. I called out, then ran to catch up with him. I still don't know how he slipped away, but he was gone when I rounded the other side.

Ralph found me there nearly two hours later, sitting with my back squeezed up against the rear of the cannon and chewing on my fingernails. "Norm! Haven't you reported to Cropp yet? What are

you bucking for, a court-martial?"

I chewed off another nail. "I'm not going anywhere near him," I replied with a shudder. "Not without protection."

"Protection?" Ralph looked at me as though he thought I'd flipped. Probably he did. But he gave me an idea, too.

"Ralph, let me borrow your pistol. You can keep your holster flap shut and nobody will know it's missing."

He eyed me dubiously. "You know as well as I do they don't issue us clips for our sidearms," he said. That didn't worry me. I could swipe a clip at the post firing range. "Besides, I'm responsible for signing my weapon out —"

"Ralph, please! If you've ever trusted me, trust me now. I want you to go tell Major Cropp I'll meet him right here, tonight, as soon as it gets dark. Tell him I'll be here alone, and we can finish what we started last night."

He hesitated but, finally, somewhat to my surprise, handed over his automatic without another word. Then he walked away, wearing a bemused expression.

I was sure of it. Cropp was my man — or, rather, my wolf. Whatever had created his unnatural condition, I decided, must also have brought my Mr. Lazarus to this place as a sort of counterbalance. It was all too deep for me, but I did

remember from both Mr. Lazarus' remarks and TV's late show what could kill a werewolf.

There wasn't much time until dark, and I had three places to go between now and then with an illicit goal at each one. I filched my clip of ammunition fairly easily and even managed to lift that new medallion out of its display case in the museum. The hard part was getting into the cadet science building after hours and firing up a Bunsen burner in the chem lab without getting caught.

But I was back at my appointed place in time, waiting for Cropp with Ralph's pistol clenched in my hand. Even on this cold winter night, I could feel the sweat on the back of my neck.

"He's not coming, Norm."

I barely managed to keep from jerking the trigger. "Ralph! I didn't hear you walk up." I lowered the gun. "What did Cropp say when you gave him the message?"

The full moon behind Ralph shadowed his features, but his voice sounded a little hoarse. "I didn't give him your message," he said. "It wasn't him you saw last night. It was me."

I started to ask if he was getting a cold when the import of his words sunk in. "Ralph — you? My God, why?"

"You — know." It could hardly be called a voice any longer, but a

barely comprehensible growling sound. "Bingo. I want her. Nobody's going to keep her from me. Not you — not that other man she loved —"

I remembered the tabloid descriptions of how that other man had been ripped apart and realized no broken windshield had done it. The realization also came to me as to who turned my hat in to Cropp, and who'd watered down Cropp's precious uniform. Slowly, carefully, I brought the pistol back up.

"Fool," he rumbled. "Even if you got bullets — they won't hurt me — I learned the secret — when they sent me away"

No wonder he'd survived Vietnam so easily. "But there's no war here, Ralph. You've got to quit doing this — this whatever it is. It has no place here. Ralph, are you listening to me? Ralph —"

The flash of my shot revealed him as he sprang, lighting up the bestial face, the long pointed teeth, the hands that looked more like claws. The bullet, cast from that silver medallion I'd melted down in the lab, thudded into him and toppled him backward into the snow.

By the time I reached him, he looked like his normal self once more. There was nothing of the animal I'd glimpsed. I barely had time to slip his pistol into his hand before people came running over to

see what the noise had been.

Nobody understood why Ralph would kill himself. The most popular theory was that he'd brooded too long over some bad experience in Southeast Asia. I never ventured an opinion, myself.

And I never saw the mysterious Mr. Lazarus again. Perhaps the removal of what he'd called an anomaly had made him no longer necessary. But there were times when I wondered if I had ever seen him — if it might not have been me,

rather than Ralph, who changed so horribly that night. Could I have wanted Bingo so badly that my subconscious invented a delusion to justify my murdering a potential rival?

It wasn't until I located a paperback book on some of Hollywood's old character actors that I finally convinced myself that Mr. Lazarus had to be real. You see, he was right — Maria Ouspenskaya *was* born in Russia, thank God.

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David Redd, who wrote several fine stories for F&SF in the late 1960's ("Sundown," "A Quiet Kind of Madness"), returns with a very different tale about an ending on one world and a beginning on another.

Morning

by DAVID REDD

That night, Kirsty wandered away from the festivities. She followed the sound of voices down a long corridor, her ice-blue dress brushing across the carpet as she reached the open door.

Kirsty saw a roomful of strange machines. Count de Luna had his back to the door. Beside him, also in black evening dress, stood the servant Grondahl.

"Thirty minutes," said the count. "Then the death of us all is inevitable."

Kirsty gasped in horror. Both men saw her.

Count de Luna snatched at a lever. "That woman! Stop her!"

Kirsty fled. The death of them all —

Someone caught her from behind; her necklace came apart in a shower of pearls. She struggled and screamed for help, but two more servants appeared. One thrust a cloth in her mouth. She

was helpless.

"A trying moment," said Count de Luna. "The top of the south tower, Grondahl."

The men dragged her up to the dark, deserted roof of the castle. Soon she found herself alone in a high tower, crying to the empty night.

"Where is Count de Luna?" asked Tessenman. "He is not one who neglects his guests."

Madam Taumer smiled. "Ah, there he is. He has been to the cellars with Grondahl."

More wine! thought Tessenman. Young de Luna must have emptied the cellars for tonight. All the notables of Sondeborg town were here, young and old. The castle servants had arranged the celebrations; Count de Luna had no wife, nor had he brought one home from the other world.

Madam Taumer indicated the

noise and movement further down the hall. "See the young people, dancing between the tables!"

Tessenman merely nodded. If he danced it would overstrain his heart, and he would join her late husband, but this she did not know.

Count de Luna approached their table. A silver crescent sparkled on his dark chest. "Secretary Tessenman, Madam Taumer. Is your evening going pleasantly?"

"It is marvelous," said Madam Taumer. "You must do this more frequently, now you are home to stay."

"I fear not. One cannot reach fifty again."

A servant brought them an unopened bottle.

"For you alone," said Count de Luna. "You see, Secretary Tessenman? It is from the country where you served the empire for so long." The count consulted his watch. "Now, if you will permit me —"

"Of course. You have other guests."

"Yes. And I have my new entertainment to prepare." The count departed; his servant poured the wine.

Slowly Tessenman raised his glass. "I was in Sierra Madre del Sol as they brought in the vintage. Every year I was there."

"Our count is so considerate," said Madam Taumer.

"Old Jose made this," Tessen-

man continued. "He has been dead these fifteen years, poor fellow. I wish he could see his wine now. There are so many memories within this glass. No matter. To what shall we drink?"

"Ourselves."

Tessenman brought his glass to hers.

"To ourselves, my dear Elisabeth. To ourselves."

Grondahl arrived. "It is time for your announcement, sir."

"One moment." Count de Luna opened the window to the night. Then he threw out an empty glass and somberly watched it fall.

Three feet above the ground, the glass slowed and was halted. It hung suspended in the air.

Success. The field was rising.

Quietly the count closed the window. His guests were looking at him expectantly.

A local landowner asked, "What's this big affair your man's hinting at?"

"Patience, my friend," said the count. "Now I will tell everyone."

They listened.

First he reminded them how he had visited the other world. He had brought back many inventions and ideas. "All of you have prospered from my gifts."

They murmured in agreement. Someone said, "Very generous."

"Now, in return, you will do

something for me." He paused, gauging their reactions. "You will die."

They were silent. Then the landowner shouted, "Die?"

"Die," said Count de Luna. "I am using another device from the world of machines. A stasis field is rising around us; before morning it will be solid over the highest towers of Sondeborg. The field has covered its generators and now maintains itself. No, do not attempt to leave. The field has covered the grounds. As it rises through the castle, it will engulf us all."

A woman said, "I don't understand."

He explained. All motion would cease. A scientist might argue that stasis was not precisely death, but to them the effect would be the same. They would be dead.

"Now, my friends —" he ignored their increasing noise — "there are plans for viewing devices in the town. In ages to come the curious will look through the walls of this castle and see how you died. We will all be like the glass statues of Herr Kronstadt: dead, unchanging, until time comes to an end."

Someone screamed.

He had a few final details. "If the field only covers part of your body, the effects are not pleasant. It is better to walk straight in and let your momentum carry you forward. My servants will trace the progress

of the field, so you will not be caught unawares."

The scream had come from the doctor's wife. "You'll kill us all!"

Dr. Andersen tugged at his wife, but she ignored him and drew out a gun. "Stop this field thing! Turn it off!"

"I cannot. Once initiated, the field expands of itself. As I told you, good lady, there is no escape."

Turning his back on the gun was a deliberate and delightful risk. Men had honor, but women had to defend themselves. He walked calmly to the door and looked back; Andersen was comforting his sobbing wife.

"My friends, there is ample food and drink on the upper floors. My castle is yours. You may do whatever you wish during your last hours."

Then he was out in the cool empty corridor, alone with the portraits of his ancestors.

He smiled.

Kirsty gazed at the dark waters of Sondefjord, hundreds of feet below her prison. How could she warn people about Count de Luna from here? But she had nothing to help her escape; her bag was down in the hall, and she was too careful of her figure to carry concealed weapons.

From the other window she could see the grounds of Sonde-

borg, peaceful in the moonlight. On the drive, made tiny by distance, someone moved.

He was walking up the drive, pale and naked beneath the electric bulbs. Whoever he was, she needed him.

"Help! Get me out of here! Up here!"

He stopped. She put her arm through the narrow slit and waved, but when she looked again, he had gone from view.

Kirsty prayed he had seen her. But why had he been without clothes?

She sat back inside her cell. The thirty minutes must have been up long ago. Whatever Count de Luna had planned, she had been unable to stop him.

"He is quite mad," said Madam Taumer.

Tessenman sighed. "Madness is not easy to define, my dear. Remember, the count has lived in that other world."

"Does he mean what he says?"

"I fear so." Tessenman set down his glass. "Come, let us see Dr. Andersen for a medical opinion on the stasis field."

At the doctor's table, Sonja Andersen was wiping away tears. Behind the couple stood some young people, arguing loudly about Count de Luna's speech.

"Sonja?" asked Madam Tau-

mer, without reply.

"She is better," said Dr. Andersen. "It was a great shock to her."

"It was a great shock to us all," said Tessenman. "Tell me, is this plan of the count's possible?"

"Yes, it's possible!" cried Andersen. "I've seen his stasis field before! Listen!"

Tessenman let him speak.

"I do experiments now and then, you know that. One day the count watched me freezing a toad in liquid oxygen. He pulled out a little machine and asked for another toad. It froze at once. I tried to touch it, but I couldn't. There was something solid but invisible all round that toad."

"As if it was in a glass paper-weight," said Tessenman.

"Yes, exactly. Invisible. He said the toad was in a stasis field — in a bubble where time had stopped."

Tessenman realized the youngsters had ceased arguing to listen. A girl asked, "So time will stop here too? He'll make statues of us?"

"It's true," said Andersen. "He can do it. God, this is terrible. I was the poet-doctor, famous all over the empire! Now it ends, and I'll be nothing."

Suddenly the doctor hurled his glass against the wall. He helped his wife to her feet. "Come along! I can't think in here."

Tessenman watched the couple

leave. The husband too was a little unstable.

He wondered how many guns there were among the guests. Only the women would wish to come armed. The men had more need of sprays for sobering — and even those sprays, he remembered, were gifts from Count de Luna.

He heard a shout from the young people. A boy called "Yes! I'll do it!" and the group began moving towards the door.

"What has he agreed to do?" asked Tessenman.

"Go out," replied the girl. "He'll walk straight into the count's field!"

Tessenman led Madam Taumer back to their table, away from the nightmare.

Passing a window, Count de Luna noticed a figure on the steps outside. A young man was in the field already — upright, unmoving, dead. The boy's father, the old general, would have been proud of that death.

The night had started well; de Luna continued along the corridor.

Grondahl appeared, unusually agitated.

"A visitor, sir. He walked through the field. I saw him. You said that was impossible, sir."

The count smiled. He had hoped John would come. "Grondahl, no mortal man can survive in

the stasis field."

"But —"

"Our visitor is not mortal. He cannot be killed. He is the Jew, Grondahl. The Jew." The count saw comprehension appear on Grondahl's face. "Now, where is he?"

Grondahl made no more protests. "This way, sir."

The newcomer was buttoning up an aged brown suit. The servant said, "As he had no clothes, sir —"

"Very good, Anton. Leave us."

"I am too late," said the Jew.

"Yes, John. I thought the field would not affect you."

"And these?" John pointed down to the door. Count de Luna saw three figures where there had been one. A man and woman had joined the general's son, both frozen into awkward, unattractive positions.

"They would not listen," said John. "They saw me come through the field."

Count de Luna nodded. Their disorder would enhance the control of the first boy.

"Franz," said the Jew, "you have a woman imprisoned in your south tower. Why?"

"That girl," said the count. "Grondahl! We may release the Kronstadt girl now." Grondahl hurried off. The count went on: "She discovered my preparations too soon. Most regrettable. Now, let

me explain my grand design”

He knew John, with his centuries of experience, would appreciate his plans. Still talking, they went on into the hall.

Tessenman stared at the servant. “Costumes?”

“Yes, sir. Many of our younger guests wanted them. We have a full wardrobe of historical clothing, sir.”

Impatiently Tessenman sent the man to the next table.

“Such nonsense!” Tessenman gestured at a centuries-old portrait on the wall. “Would I wish to be that?”

“You would look rather splendid, my dear,” said Madam Taurmer.

He almost chuckled. “It is not attire I would choose. Of course, if you want a costume yourself —”

“Thank you, Rolf, no. Perhaps we shall be ready for diversions later.”

Another servant approached. “Your pardon, sir. The stasis field is approaching the level of this floor. Count de Luna advises you to leave the hall within ten minutes.”

“With pleasure,” said Tessenman. “Can you suggest a quiet room on the upper floors?”

“The crimson lounge, sir?”

“Perfect. Bring our wine.”

Tessenman let Madam Taurmer arise first. He said, “I trust the

crimson lounge will be without these interruptions.”

On this of all nights he desperately wanted peace.

As the evening continued, Count de Luna found that John was determined to be awkward. Too many people were taking offense at his remarks. But the Jew was the only disruptive element, and the count was surprised by the lack of violence. No attempts at escape? His guests had grown soft on his gifts. Perhaps they would become wild later on, as the rising field forced them upwards.

John touched his arm. “That girl, Franz, drinking there. Is she the one from your tower?”

“Yes.” He led John over to Kirsty and introduced them. He explained to her: “John saw you and reminded me I had not released you.”

“Thanks,” said Kirsty. She stared sullenly at the count. “You’re wearing a moon on your chest. It should be a skull! Oh, why did I let you catch me?”

“It would have made no difference.”

“I’d have stopped you somehow!”

He was enjoying this. “Remember, Miss Kronstadt, you failed. You must admit your failure and allow yourself to appreciate my grand design.”

"It's diabolical!" Kirsty emptied her glass in his face. When he could see again, she was gone.

He wiped the drink from his eyes. "Perfect!"

The Jew looked at him with distaste and walked to the door.

On the way upstairs Kirsty met a friend coming down — a boy of her own age.

"Kirsty! Lovely Kirsty. We missed you." His teeth were gleaming, his eyes sparkling. He wore a curly brown wig and skin-tight furry trousers. From the waist up he was naked; a golden locket hung at his chest. "Kirsty. Come and change with us!"

Kirsty backed away. "No, Niels, I'm not in the mood. Not after he shut me in the tower."

"You'd better come, Kirsty!" He caught her arm. "Tonight's the last chance you'll get!"

"Don't rush me, Niels. I don't like it."

"Everything's rushed, we're making up for a whole lifetime! You're coming!"

She pulled herself away, tearing her dress. Then someone appeared in a nearby door. "What —"

Niels hesitated. Kirsty dashed off along the corridor, narrowly missing two girls in white gauze. Further on, she risked a backward glance.

She was alone again.

Tessenman and Madam Taumer made themselves comfortable in the crimson armchairs, surrounded by old tapestries and long shelves of leather-bound volumes. In the far corner was an old brigadier quietly drinking himself into insensibility.

Once or twice they were interrupted by young people dressed as mythological spirits, but the youngsters quickly departed. Except for the distant brigadier, Tessenman was alone with Elisabeth. Time passed.

The door opened; Dr. Andersen peered in. "Secretary Tessenman. May I intrude for a while?"

"Certainly."

"I am so sorry about Sonja," said Madam Taumer.

"Thank you," said the doctor.

Tessenman had heard the story as he left the hall. The doctor's wife had thrown herself from a window, into the field.

"There is a balcony above her," said Andersen. "I can climb the balustrade, the count says. I can step down to join her."

The crimson lounge was quiet. Some time ago Tessenman had heard shots, faint and distant, but nothing since. He did not know what was occurring elsewhere, nor did he wish to know.

The doctor was shaking his head, staring at the rows of books. He picked out a volume with an in-

expensive cloth binding. "This one is mine. The first book of poems I had printed."

"Your first-born," said Tessenman.

"Exactly," said Andersen. "I shall take this one. My others were more polished, but empty. Well, they shall see."

The doctor bowed to them. Tessenman spoke in farewell, but Anderson left without another word.

The artistic mind was beyond understanding.

Count de Luna brooded over the course of events. If anyone was to kill him, it would be in the next hour. After that, only the more balanced guests would remain.

He looked up hopefully, but the newcomer was John.

The Jew was now wearing a long buff cloak with a red and gold pattern down the edges; beneath it was a white tunic tied at his waist by a colored cord.

Count de Luna gestured at the clothes. "Not Moorish robes, surely?"

"It resembles the ancient dress of my people," said John. "I prefer it to the clothes your servant provided. It was the innkeeper's costume in your Nativity properties."

"Then it is quite old," said the Count. "They have not put on that play for years."

"I guessed," said the Jew.

"Go away," said Kirsty, trying to ignore his gun.

"I can help you," said the boy in black trousers. He followed her into the room.

The wardrobes were open. To her relief several dresses from the last hundred years were still on the frames.

"You can kill yourself so easily," said the boy.

Kirsty turned her back on him. She took off her tattered ice-blue dress.

"So lovely . . . such a waste." He let the gun fall.

Kirsty said nothing. This one was mad. She felt ill in his presence. She forced herself to pick out a costume.

"You want to dress again?" he asked. "Look, choose what you want! Dresses . . . skirts . . . shoes . . ."

He held up his hands, and she found herself fascinated by them. The boy pressed closer. He was lifting his hands to her throat when the door opened.

Kirsty jerked back in sudden alarm. A girl in ragged gauze entered.

The boy snatched up his gun. He called eagerly, "Do you want to die?"

Someone else appeared. It was Niels, still dressed as a satyr, wig slipping to reveal the close-cropped

hair beneath. Hē stared at the three of them, rubbing his head slowly as if in pain. Then he came further in, took hold of both boy and girl and pushed them firmly out into the corridor.

Kirsty watched him lock the door and come towards her.

Tessenman went outside for assistance. The corridor was deserted: the emergency lighting was dim. At irregular intervals along the floor were little heaps of cloth, and he could smell an elusive foul odor which was somehow familiar. Fortunately Grondahl was nearby, and Tessenman led him back to the lounge.

Tessenman indicated the brigadier in his stupor. "Grondahl, how can we help him?"

Grondahl studied the brigadier.

"You have not sobered him."

"No. Shall I?"

"Leave him," said Grondahl.

"Each must come to his own end."

"How many times have you said that tonight, Grondahl?" asked Madam Taumer.

"Many times, madam. Is that all?"

"No," said Madam Taumer. "Sit down, Grondahl. We will talk."

Each must come to his own end, thought Tessenman. The will of Count de Luna. But he himself had been prepared for the end since his

first attack.

"Do you think," she was asking, "that the count is insane?"

"Madam, I will not discuss my master."

"Even though he has condemned you to death?"

"I serve Count de Luna. I obey him."

Tessenman restrained Grondahl. "Do not leave yet. Why, Grondahl, why do you serve the count?"

"I am his servant," said Grondahl.

"Go on," said Tessenman. "Is there any limit to your devotion?"

"I have my duty," said Grondahl.

"Even now?" asked Madam Taumer.

"Even now. Are you satisfied, madam? May I go?"

"One more question," said Tessenman. "Are you happy, Grondahl?"

Grondahl scowled.

"There is no such thing as happiness."

And afterwards, Tessenman pictured the young Grondahl growing up within this castle, dominated by the jagged cliffs of Sondefjord and by the dark-eyed portraits on the walls. The young Rolf Tessenman had been more fortunate; the training schooner, the imperial service, the whitewashed houses of the Navarre circuit.

And yet Grondahl also was prepared.

Eventually Kirsty got up and found a lamp. Niels was still lying on the floor.

She chose an old dress with a dark ankle-length skirt and a light mauve top. Putting it on took some time.

Niels had pulled himself into a sitting position.

"Kirsty . . ."

"Niels." She stood over him again. "Can I take your locket? It'll go with this dress."

In silence he handed it up. The locket was hollow; one side held a picture of Niels, and the other side was empty.

Kirsty picked up a faded parasol from the floor. "That's everything, I think. Well, good-by, Niels." She knelt down and gave him a lengthy kiss. "Enjoy yourself. If you want me later, I'll still be around."

"Will you?"

"Yes." She hesitated. "Look, Niels, I won't go before you do. If I mean nothing else tonight, I mean this. Come for me later."

Niels said, "I wanted to help you," but Kirsty made no reply.

Parasol in hand, she stepped out into the corridor. She felt curiously at ease. Seeing a servant, she asked him where the refreshments were.

"This way, madam."

"Thank you," said Kirsty.

She was shown into a long well-lit room. Four men were playing cards at a table; other people were sitting quietly in groups. The servant brought her a bottle.

She was joined by a swarthy man in colorful Eastern robes. The clothes were odd, but she knew the face.

"I remember," she said. "You're John. I know all the old legends about you. Would you like a drink?"

"No. Come to my table."

Kirsty nodded. On the way she passed the card players. They were gambling with handwritten notes for hundreds of millions of crowns. Poor men. She seated herself in a corner with the Jew.

"The last time we met," said John, "you threw your drink at Count de Luna."

So she had. It seemed a very long time ago.

"Would you do it again?"

"No," said Kirsty. "It was a waste of a drink. I wanted to kill him once, but not now."

"You as well," said John. "This calm acceptance of your fate. I had hoped — no."

"John," she said, "don't talk in riddles. Tell me something. You can't die, and you hate suffering. Why did you come here?"

"To stop this madness. I was

too late."

"No," said Kirsty. "That isn't all. What's keeping you here?"

He buried his face in his hands. "I cannot bring myself to tell you."

"Try."

"It is not safe. I cannot persuade myself that it is safe."

After that he refused to speak at all, and Kirsty went on drinking, watching him. She felt alone, as if he was only a picture of a man and behind the painted face there was nothing.

Tessenman reflected on the time remaining to them.

He recalled the things he had left undone; they did not matter now. The only person who mattered was beside him, her face mellow in candlelight.

"My dear Elisabeth, I find I am selfish. I want you with me."

Her eyes became moist. "Forgive my weakness, Rolf. You are kinder to an old woman than I dared hope."

"In these last hours. I wished for longer."

Madam Taumer sighed. "You do understand. You know. Think, I saw them yesterday."

"Who, my dear?"

"Oh, my daughter and her husband. Dear Rolf. I went early to their house, when only his father was there. You remember the

morning, damp and chilly. There was a beautiful sun among the clouds, like a bright patch of burning copper. I kept looking at it, it was so wonderful among the dampness and the grey clouds. I was in the garden, Rolf. They were never good gardeners, and I liked to help tidy their plants. Don't you like to use your hands?"

"I do." He had to encourage her.

"That is nice. He has had to do it often. Henrik would not let him marry for money. They came up into the yard. I saw them through the bushes. His mother was with them, and little Elisabeth they named after me. She was wearing her old Leyden scarf. He was carrying Elisabeth. And they smiled so when I came through . . . Rolf, Rolf! They were so happy that morning!"

"Remember that," he said.

"I do, oh, I do. But, that morning — Rolf! I did so want you to love them too!"

"Yes, my dear. All this would have happened."

And for a moment he was jealous of the dead Henrik Taumer, who had lived out his life with her and met his end in his own time.

As the count was being attended to, he saw the Jew come over.

"At last," said John, studying his bruises. "How did it happen?"

Count de Luna motioned to Alex Nielsen. "Tell him."

"Oh . . . yes." The girl explained how Pastor Elling had attacked the count on the stairs. John listened, and sighed. "Franz, did you have to kill the pastor?"

"He said we should leave them alone when they are dead!" The count laughed. "Sending him into the field was a pleasure!"

"You are inhuman," said John.

"You should know," said the count. He laughed again. An excellent night.

"Your men searched the place for guns," said John. "Are you genuinely removing temptation or merely preparing some new devilry?"

"John, the time for violence is past. You see, my grand design moves onward."

"Is anything further possible?"

"I am striving for artistic perfection. As the field drives us higher, nearer death, my guests will begin examining their lives for meaning and purpose."

"Will you study your own life?"

"Certainly," said the count. "I have my memories."

John looked away.

The count saw Alex join the girl John had left. It was the Kronstadt girl; apparently she had inherited her late father's taste for alcohol. He pointed this out to John.

"The drink? It was your doing,

Franz. You destroyed her and her father. But you have destroyed so many things, Count Sondeborg."

Being called by the old name mused the count. He knew what John was thinking. It was true that he had destroyed many things. "It is in our nature. Why, you are immortal and now death is your greatest desire. For myself—"

He had lived in the other world.

Kirsty patted Alex on the hand. "Was it so bad?"

"Horrible . . . Worse than anything you could imagine."

As Alex spoke, Kirsty could see her wounds through the tears in her dress. Kirsty discovered that she did possess emotion — for Alex who had suffered, if not for those who had died. She leaned over and kissed her. "You're safe from them now. It's a pity I didn't see you before."

"Yes! I came looking for you right after the count's speech, but I couldn't find you. I looked everywhere."

"Oh," said Kirsty.

She had been in the south tower . . . a greater punishment than the count had known.

"I couldn't help it, Alex. I missed his speech."

"Forget it," said Alex softly. "Come closer and listen. We can choose a death he hasn't planned."

Kirsty listened intently.

The stasis field had covered its own generators and now could not be switched off. It was rising, dome-shaped, like a balloon being filled with heated air. Alex had thought about this and realized that the field would be at its thinnest by the cliffs overlooking Sondefjord. From the west wall there was a sheer drop of hundreds of feet to the rocks and water below. A balcony jutted out over this wall, looking towards the village where Alex had been born.

"If I jump out from the balcony," Alex went on, "I might miss the field altogether. If not, I'll drop straight through its edge. Momentum."

"You'll be smashed to pieces," said Kirsty.

"Yes. I'll be out of Sondeborg. He won't hang on to Alexandra Nielsen. My dear this and my dear that! I'm not spending eternity with these people."

Kirsty's objection was to dying.

"Now," said Alex. "I'll jump into the fjord now, before the field gets thicker. Will you come with me? The two of us?"

"Cheating the count," said Kirsty.

"Keeping together. Will you?"

"I — I don't know," said Kirsty. She wanted to be with Alex, but she had a vague idea that she ought to wait for Niels.

"You don't want to," said Alex. "I see."

"No, it's not that."

"Never mind! Don't try to explain. I'll go alone."

"You're going home," said Kirsty. "I wouldn't be."

"The count's got you all the way, dear Kirsty. And I thought I'd been hurt — All right, stay here. Give my love to Count de Luna."

Alex stood up, then bent down to kiss Kirsty. Reaching out, Kirsty felt the new roughness of her body.

"Coming?" asked Alex.

"I'm sorry," said Kirsty. "Good-by, Alex — Alexandra."

Kirsty closed her eyes. She could not bear to see Alex go.

Count de Luna watched Anton tie the ropes across the head of the stairs. This was the last floor of the main building; after this his guests would retreat to the roof and the battlements. The towers would provide a final hour or two.

The count was not satisfied with the progress of his scheme. There had been some excellent moments — even Elling had been a success — but his guests were not yet engaging in discussion of life and death. They were so slow in everything!

"Sir!" Grondahl was hurrying towards him. "Sir, one of the guests has escaped."

Impossible, thought the count.

No, Grondahl could not be mistaken. This could mean the ruin of his grand design.

"It was Miss Nielsen," Grondahl explained. "She flung herself from the west tower and passed through the field. Her body is on the cliffs."

He understood immediately. The field was still low at its perimeter. He had boasted too much to Alex Nielsen, and she had found a weakness. He would have to put guards on the balcony to prevent more escapes.

Her manner of suicide had robbed him of a life. She would never be on display for the ages now. With this, and the apathy of the others, his design was failing in so many ways.

His plans had never failed in the other world.

Kirsty awoke.

The room was full of candles. She was lying fully dressed on a crimson couch. Her mind felt alive and clear; she had been sobered. Memory returned. She had been drinking after Alex had gone.

How had she come here?

Two elderly people stood over her, their faces full of compassion. She recognized them as Madam Taumer and Secretary Tessenman.

"Good evening," said Kirsty.

"Good evening," said the secretary. "How are you feeling?"

"Well, thank you."

"I am so glad," said Madam Taumer. "We hoped we were correct in helping you."

"You were," said Kirsty. "How did I get here?"

"The Wanderer brought you," said Madam Taumer. "He said it would cancel an imprisonment."

The Wanderer was John's name in the old stories. So he had saved her, he and these two. She said, "I'm very grateful."

Madam Taumer smiled and handed Kirsty a small folded paper. "The Wanderer said he found this beside you."

"Thank you." Kirsty put the paper on the table beside an empty wine bottle. "You've been very kind to me."

"There is always time to help another," said the secretary.

"It has been a pleasure to meet you," said Madam Taumer. "I am sorry we could not talk for longer."

"We are going downstairs now," said Tessenman. He held open the door for Madam Taumer. "Good evening, Miss Kronstadt."

"Good evening, and thank you," said Kirsty, watching them go out from the lounge. They were nice people.

Now she could read the note Madam Taumer had given her. Unfolding the paper, she saw a spiky familiar handwriting. Niels.

"Good-by, damn you."

He must have come and found her drunk. What in the world could he have thought? Kirsty screwed up the note, hurled it away, and cried.

But she still had his locket at her neck. She jumped up, recovered the note and folded it up as small as possible; it just went into the locket. Now she had kept something of Niels.

Dear God, he must have gone into the field after leaving her . . . after finding her . . .

Abruptly, she realized where Madam Taumer and Secretary Tessenman had gone. Downstairs. And how much longer would this floor remain safe?

She ran for the stairs. The corridor outside was suddenly long; she could almost feel the stasis field rising beneath her.

She knew she was running further away from Niels.

Kirsty threw herself up the stairway and collapsed, having gained the height she needed. She lay there and thought about many things.

Eventually she pulled herself to her feet and went on up the stairs.

Inside the battlements the flat paved area was illuminated by the drifting moon. Count de Luna paced slowly along the terrace, counting the guests who had reached the roof. Only six.

Something had failed. His vic-

tims had accepted their fate too calmly. The drama he had envisaged was gone.

The Kronstadt girl appeared. That made seven.

Was that all?

One of those seven, he saw, was John.

Kirsty had no other place to go. So she seated herself on the steps of the south tower. She watched John and the count talking with the other guests. She stared at the stone battlements and at the cold moon shining high above the silent castle. This was an unhappy place to die. Whatever had Count de Luna done in that world of machines, to come back and bring death as his final gift?

Presently, Kirsty saw the guests lying stiff and motionless. John and the count were leaping across the battlements towards her. The servants had disappeared.

The count reached her steps, followed by John. Kirsty smiled. "Are you running from the field?"

"It does not matter to me," said John.

Kirsty nodded. "John of Mainz does not die."

She smiled again at their surprise; at last her curiosity had been worthwhile.

Kirsty had traced back the appearances of the Wanderer through history for over five hundred years,

back to a distant town call Mainz. She believed that the Wanderer was not a supernatural being, but only a medieval alchemist who had found the thing he sought. Now, watching John's face, she knew she was right.

"I forgot you were inquisitive," said the count.

Kirsty ignored him. She looked straight at John.

"If you have the secret of eternal life, why don't you share it?"

John covered his face. "It was an accident . . . I cannot repeat it . . ."

She glanced up at the count, and something in his face fascinated her. So like an expression of John's. And that crescent on his chest — an alchemist's symbol?

She asked, "Do you have the blood of Mainz in you?"

"He was the first Count Sodeborg," de Luna said. "Ask him."

"I tried to be normal," whispered John. "It did not succeed. My sons dying, my grandsons . . . Franz is the last . . ."

"Yes, the last!" The count waved at the towers of his frozen castle. "Soon I shall join the rest, and only our undying Jew will walk away."

Kirsty frowned at John. "How can you, even you, walk through the stasis field?"

"I did not intend it," said the count, "but it resulted from making the field transparent for the

viewers. No one else can walk through. Devices from two different worlds have created this field, and it would take you a million years to discover what I have done."

"But why did you do it?" asked Kirsty.

The count was slow in replying. He said, "That world tells us, by merely existing, that ours is not the only creation. And after I understood this, I saw a statue. It was a huge column of people, climbing over each other, all struggling, rising higher on the bodies of their brothers and sisters. Brothers and sisters! Each generation the same! Now do you understand what I tried?" He must have realized he was shouting. "My field did not work. The doctor wrote no farewell poem. Why were there no discussions, no great truths revealed?"

"The only great truth is that there are no great truths," said John. "Franz, if you had studied men and not machines you would have learned this."

Kirsty could see that she would get no intelligible answers, ever. While these men were talking, the field was still rising.

She stood. "Let's go up the steps."

John came with her, but the count would not move.

"Aren't you coming?" she called. "Please come!"

"You know everything; you

know why I stay here! Remember your father, drinking himself to death with my *Wunderkind* unfinished!"

"But I'd like you with me!"

"Human desires!" he shouted and turned away.

He threw himself downwards and was still. His body lay in the field.

Her world grew smaller. Niels, Alex, even the count. Every person she knew was dead and gone out of her life. Only the living ghost who was the Wanderer remained.

"Why?" she asked. "Why did the count —"

"It was not his fault," said John. "He lived in the other world, where such things are common. Jews especially have suffered."

"You should go and put that other world right, to stop it poisoning this one. Or don't you care about us?"

John looked impatient. "If the field could take me, I would enter it now. This life means nothing."

"Then go to the other world," said Kirsty. "You belong there!"

Kirsty turned her back on the Jew. She stepped down towards the body of Count de Luna.

Or was she deserting John when he needed someone most? Even as she hurried downwards, she glanced back and called, "I'm sorry, John."

Then a wave of slowness came

up her body, and she knew there was no more time.

She surrendered to eternity.

Kirsty awoke to bright sunlight, her eyes blinking.

She saw the countryside and gasped. Gone were the jagged rocks, the pine trees and the fjords. In their place a gentle plain was fringed by the sea, with green grass and clumps of round spreading trees. Standing above her, in unfamiliar clothes, was John.

She looked at him. "Oh, you . . . And the people out there . . ."

"Do not be alarmed," said John. "They are my friends from the other world, who helped me rescue you."

She had fancied that she was dead and in heaven and that his face was the face of an angel.

At her feet she saw Count de Luna asleep in the sunlight. "Have you saved us all?" John nodded, but she went on: "The green fields! The sea! What happened last night?"

"Oh," said John, "it was not last night. There was a plague, and several times of ice, and other unpleasant things . . . but I had business in the other world. I was immortal, and none of you could die."

Kirsty thought of the other guests downstairs.

Those who had not destroyed

themselves could be alive still. "Niels — what about Niels, my — my friend?"

"If he was in the field, he is safe."

So Niels had survived, and Alex had not. Kirsty gazed again at the bright changed landscape. The count had said it would take a million years to understand what he

had done.

"I must go to Niels," she said. "John, how can we thank you?"

John smiled but did not reply. Then he bent over the sleeping Count Sondeborg. "Franz! Franz, my son, awake!"

Kirsty left them there and went searching for Niels to share her morning.



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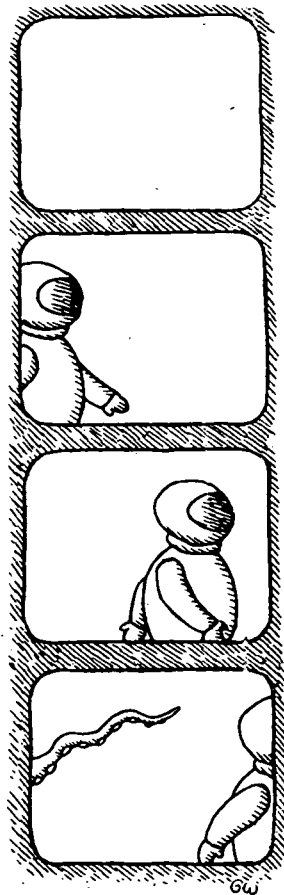
AD INFINITUM, AD NAUSEUM, ETC.

Having been occupied with one special event or another in this column for the last few months, I've accumulated a list of minor matters that we might look into. In more or less chronological order, they are:

The Dark Secret of Harvest Home was a TV movie adapted from Tom Tryon's novel *Harvest Home* (I would guess the title change was to be sure no one thought it was an episode of *The Waltons*). Its running time was 5 hours with commercials; Tryon's book took several hundred pages, and Shirley Jackson, in "The Lottery" said it all on the same subject in 10 pages.

The subject is, of course, the survival into modern times of the custom of human sacrifices to insure the fertility of the land. The teleplay was unbelievably slow, and anyone who had read Graves, Mitcheson, Renault or Jackson knew that the young farmer of Apollonian beauty who has been chosen harvest king is going to get it in the end and that the urban couple who has just moved to pastoral Cornwall Coombe, Conn. (where they are prone to lines like "If you cock your head just right, you can hear the corn growin'") is in for a lot of problems.

BAIRD SEARLES Films and Television



Nevertheless, considering the simple minded subject matter of most horror films even ten years ago, this handling of pretty arcane stuff for a mass audience made it of some interest. Also the fact that this very magazine is edited out of a place called *Cornwall, Conn.* (I work out of New York myself) makes me wonder what our beloved editor is really into out there in ruralland.

My local NET station has revived the cult series of the '60s, *The Prisoner*, and presumably other stations around the country are doing so or will be. For its time it was an extraordinary experiment in popular TV: it was one of the first closed ended "mini-series;" even though working with James Bond-age materials it was stylized and ambiguous to the point of surrealism; it used science fictional devices (also à la James Bond as decor and ornament rather than intrinsic plot elements) to an extent never seen before in commercial TV.

For the latecomers, *The Prisoner* concerns a secret agent who quits in a snit, is gassed in his apartment and wakes in a village — no, The Village — where he is kept a prisoner by who-knows-whom and where every effort is expended by *Them* (?) to find out why he has quit and every effort is expended by *him* to escape. There is no room to

go into the multiple eccentricities of The Village, but he is always known as Number 6, endlessly hounded by an ever-changing Number 2 (and who is Number 1 — hmmm?).

Now the cultists will undoubtedly stone me for this, but after about the fifth episode I began to get a little twitchy. The whole thing is so abstract that I started to not care who got what from whom, and if what's-'is-name is so bloody concerned with being an individual, why doesn't he insist on being called by name instead of answering to Number 6 as he does consistently?

Oh, I'll watch it to the end, but with a certain grumpiness.

I pointed out a while back that the pilot half-hour for *Quark* was one of the more loathsome objects that had ever come sliming across my screen, and I eyed its debut as a weekly series with only slightly more joy than I would the acquisition of leprosy. But the hour-long opening sequence actually had its moments.

The story of an interstellar garbage scow captain who hopes to become a real starship commander, it sent up everything from *2001* to *Star Wars* to (particularly) *Star Trek* and succeeded more often than one would have thought (despite the laugh track that went off at all the bad moments).

The effects are certainly acceptable, as are the costumes and directorial touches. I liked things as thrown-away as the slides they use to get from one level of the ship to another, and as major as the ship of the Gorgons (the baddies), a nice combination of *Zardoz* head and Death Star.

Particularly funny is the Head, a United Galactic leader who appears only on a large screen and is irresistibly reminiscent of "the great and terrible Oz" from *The Wizard of Oz*. His concluding salutation is always "The Galaxy, ad infinitum ..." which like all really good humor is totally, inexplicably hilarious.

And in the opening episode there was the Source, an all-powerful weapon that was mostly an omnipresent voice that did nothing much but quibble about vital facts it had forgotten to mention.

Richard Benjamin as Captain Quark, despite the low blow I took at him in the last column, does a good job of looking bemused throughout (maybe he *has* learned something from Paula), but I can see most of his crew getting pretty tiresome before long. I could do without the Bettys, a lass and her clone who are as vapid as Farrah Fawcett-Majors, and an "emotional transmute" called Gene/Jean, a

butch-looking number who goes into a swish act every other sentence and who will certainly be offensive to all four sexes.

There is also a cowardly robot named Andy (shall we give up the struggle to maintain the semantic difference between *robot* and *android*?) who is moderately amusing, and a "vegeton" alien who makes Spock look imaginative and can stay — he has the good lines.

The second episode, I'm afraid, didn't even keep up this vaguely acceptable level, save for a princess in the best slinky openwork "robe" since the last cover of *Thrilling Wonder Stories*.

Project U.F.O. has all the s-f content and imagination of *Close Encounters*, i.e. almost none. It is, in fact, like CE3K in being dramatized UFO incidents, and is of that pernicious TV school known as the "docudrama." In the second episode, for instance, which had to do with a saucer hoax, even the fake incidents were effected on screen, which gave them a spurious reality obviously meant to appeal to the credulous. It's not just bad, it's nastily phony, but I don't have the space to go on as lustily as I'd like. Maybe next time, if I have the stamina to watch any more of it.

England's David Garnett writes that he lives "half a mile from the sea and writes in a place which has been the site of some kind of building for over a thousand years — it used to be a bishop's palace; then it was the manor house of a village..." Mr. Garnett has had six sf novels published, two in the U. S. (Mirror In the Sky and The Starseekers).

Warlord of Earth

by DAVID S. GARNETT

The spell was a powerful one. It involved the blood of seven virgins, which because of the recent outbreaks of pillage and rape were somewhat scarce. Somehow Vad Granite had obtained the necessary ingredients, and he vanished me an instant before my trusty runesword lopped off his sorcerous head.

He couldn't kill me, of course; my charms and talismans protected me from that. Instead, in the blink of an eye, I was standing in a strange place, assaulted by new sounds, unfamiliar sights, peculiar odors.

Granite wouldn't have dared send me any place whence there was a chance I could return and avenge myself. No longer was I on Venhea. He'd cast me away — higher than mountains, deeper than oceans, further than the far edge of the Universe. Across time and space, through the other side of the mirror, to ... somewhere.

The fiendish magician could only use his thaumaturgical talents to dispatch me to the precise astrological corollary of the co-ordinates where he'd thwarted me. So the alien sun was high, the tide on the ebb, the season was summer.

I was standing in an area of archaic buildings, glass-sided and many stories tall. But what amazed me more than this was that the humanoid inhabitants rode the streets in self-propelled horseless chariots. The stink which assailed my nostrils indicated that these automatically mobile conveyances were not powered by charmstones but by an exploding gas mechanism. Remarkable! Where could I be?

As I considered my predicament, one of the auto-mobiles stopped next to me. There were two men in the front, both wearing military uniforms, and one sitting on a seat at the back, separated from the others by a screen of interlaced

wire. It was a simple matter to deduce that the first two were soldiers serving the local chieftan and that the other one was their captive.

It seemed that my sudden arrival had already attracted unwanted attention. I turned and walked down the road, rounding the next corner.

"You there, stop!" shouted one of the soldiers — and I understood his primitive tongue! Somehow, in transferring to this world, my mind had become programmed with the native language.

Yet I had no intention of stopping and endeavored to lose myself amongst the townspeople. This was no simple task, as they were puny specimens. I was taller and broader than most of them, and my apparel was a little out of the ordinary.

The soldiers' car drew alongside me again. I halted, knowing even I couldn't outrun such a vehicle. The two men climbed out, drawing what could only be weapons from pouches on their hips and pointing them at me. I recognized the weapons from a theoretical study I'd once published on miniaturized javelin throwers — the javelins being the size of a griffin's tooth, but hurled with such speed and force that they could quite easily hurt somebody.

No warrior could submit to such an unprovoked threat, and I reached for my broadsword, *Gnasher*. It

wasn't there. I recalled that it had been in my hand when Vad Granite uttered his vile incantation, and so I could only presume the trusty blade had slipped from my grasp as I passed through the ghostly regions between Venhea and this fantastic realm.

"Frisk him, Pete," said the first soldier to his comrade. "Hands up," he said to me.

"Hands up," I repeated, trying out the lingo. "Hands up what? Hands up skirts?"

The second one, Pete, came up behind me and punched me in the kidneys, which was more than moderately painful. "Funny guy, huh? Well, I like a good laugh too."

As he was about to deliver a second blow, I spun around, twisted his wrist in a direction it was never built to turn, and forced him to drop his armament. Fortunately for both of us, reason overcame instinct and I didn't kill him. Had I done so, his companion might have taken umbrage and used his weapon on me. And such impossible armament might have thwarted my defensive amulets.

"How dare you lay a hand on me, peasant! I shall speak to your master about this."

Then the first soldier stuck the end of his device in my neck and told me: "Put your arms up against that wall. Now lean on it, taking the

weight on your hands. Spread your legs."

I obeyed.

"Gee, Zus," said Pete, "he stinks worse than the other one." He began to search through my robes and tunic, breeks and boots; he soon found my dagger, but then he produced something else. A small lump of crumpled silver parchment.

"What's this?" he said.

That was also what I wondered. Having never seen it previously, I could only surmise that for some inexplicable reason Pete was pretending he'd found it on my person. I glanced back and saw him hand his discovery to Zus, who unfolded it and sniffed the contents.

Zus nodded. "Put him in back with that other freak."

It was evident that Pete and Zus believed I was someone else. I hadn't been taken prisoner because they recognized me as a reluctant visitor from another dimension, a potential enemy. It seemed I didn't have much to worry about. By allowing myself to be taken, I might learn what I was up against. They pushed me into the back of their auto-mobile, locked the door, climbed into the front and drove away.

"Hi, man," said the other captive.

"Hi, man," said I, identifying him immediately as a potential ally.

His hair and beard weren't as long and matted as mine, his colorful robe not so torn and dirty, and his pendants didn't look as though they could protect him from a sneeze; but at least he was trying.

"I'm Lloyd. What's your label, man?"

I translated my name. "Hero," I said.

Lloyd lowered his voice so that our captors couldn't hear, saying: "They plant that grass on you, man?"

"I do not comprehend your terminology, man."

"Yeah," Lloyd, "they framed me too. But, man, you shouldn't have tried to resist, making that cop drop his gun. When they get you back to the station, they'll kick the shit out of you."

"And that is an experience you do not recommend?"

"You bet your ass, man."

"But why did these soldiers, these cops as you call them, apprehend me? What was in that silver parchment? Will they proceed to kick out your shit also, man?"

Lloyd stared at me. "Hey, man, what planet you from? It sure ain't California. The East Coast, maybe? Those ain't soldiers, them's fuzz."

"Fuzz? Is that singular or plural, man?" I said the first thing that entered my head, while my mind was busy elsewhere. Lloyd seemed very astute for an aborigi-

nal. He knew I wasn't from his world. Perhaps he could be useful to me. I'd need a body slave who was also moderately intelligent during my period of incarceration, until I could return to Venhea.

Lloyd chewed a fingernail. "Yeah, well, er, as I was, uh, saying, man, the fuzz picked on me for the same reason they stopped you. This hick town hates hippies. But when they take my prints, they'll find I dodged the draft, and that'll be me for the high jump. You dig the scene?"

I nodded, although I didn't understand a word — or rather I understood the words, but not when they were linked up to form sentences. I gathered, however, that Lloyd had no particular desire to maintain his status as prisoner. And neither, I decided, had I.

"If we escape, have you somewhere safe to hide?" I said.

"Escape? You're joking."

"I had no humorous intention. But if you wish, I shall leave on my own."

"No, man, I'll come. Like, er, what's your plan?"

"I have observed that this vehicle stops whenever a red light is displayed at the corner of an intersecting road. Next time it halts, we climb out. I'll kill the driver and you dispose of the other. We then take the auto-mobile and escape. You must decide where we go."

"You're crazy, man. You tripping or something? You on acid?"

"You have observed a flaw in my scheme?"

"We're locked in — and you can't kill a cop."

"Are they invulnerable?"

"Yes. I mean no. But killing is a real bummer."

"Unless we kill them, man, they will rapidly notify their owner of our escape."

"Forget it."

I had no intention of forgetting it.

A few heartbeats later, one of the fuzz pointed and spoke to the other. The car lurched forward and picked up speed. From the front a high-pitched oscillating wail, reminiscent of a banshee scream, howled out.

Lloyd said, "You missed your red light. So did the car in front."

Our vehicle was hunting down another car, and the scream was a warning for it to halt. It did. We overtook the offending auto-mobile, cutting in and stopping ahead of it. Pete climbed out and walked back.

I put my hand on the lever which opened the door by my side and pressed. It moved slightly. I exerted more pressure, bursting the lock. My wrist cracked. Something was wrong here, I thought, remembering also how much Pete's punch had hurt. But I swung the door

open, climbed out, went to the front, yanked that door open, grabbed Zus by the arm and pulled him into the street. Taking Lloyd's advice, I merely rendered the cop unconscious before sliding into the seat behind the driving controls.

On Venhea I was a horseman, but when I was high to a dragon, I used to drive my father's jewel-propelled antique auto-mobile on his private freeway. It was one of the half-dozen cars still in existence, relic of a forgotten past. Luckily, driving requires very little skill or brainpower — though I had plenty of each — and as I sat on the flat saddle, it all came back to me. The wheel to steer, that was the main control, although naturally some of the buttons and levers and pedals and switches were in different positions. I studied them.

"Turn the key!" shouted Lloyd from the back.

I turned it, and the engine roared into life. Before managing to impart any movement to the wheels, I accidentally touched the mechanism which started the banshee wail. Next I drove backwards very fast, colliding with the front of the car where Pete was standing. Having discovered how to go back, discovering the method of forward propulsion was no problem.

As the car began to roll forwards, I heard a thunderclap from

the rear. A hole appeared in the window, a handspan from my head, the rest of the screen dissolving into a spider's web pattern. It seemed Pete was using his peculiar weapon.

I twisted the wheel from side to side, endeavoring to present a more difficult target. We scraped against tethered cars on the right and forced ones approaching on the left to swerve aside. The auto-mobile skidded around corners, tires and siren screaming out in cacophonous duet, riding over footways, weaving in and out of cross-traffic at junctions.

"What a blast, man!" said Lloyd, clinging to the wire behind me. "You really did it. Groovy, baby."

"What is our destination?"

"My chick's pad. We'll dump the car a few blocks away."

Lloyd navigated and after a while — ten minutes, California time — he said, "This'll do. By one of those parking meters."

I had a slight difficulty finding the stop control, and we crashed through several hitching posts before colliding with a wall, though by that time our speed had been reduced to walking pace. Silencing the scream machine, I took my dagger from a shelf below the instrument panel.

Lloyd climbed out from the rear and opened my door, saying, "Far out, man. You're something else,

you know. Ripping off a fuzzmobile, what a gas!"

"Do we want these?" I asked him. I'd picked up the two small packets which Pete and Zus had purported to find on me and Lloyd.

He laughed. "Right on, man. The pigs' own dope."

"Is it?" I said, getting out.

"Let's split. And if there's the slightest thing I can do for you, just yell."

We ran.

"I need seven virgins," I said.

Lloyd laughed again. "Man, but you're a weird kind of freak," said he.

There were four nubile maidens in the domicile where we sought sanctuary — Kath, Carol, Rachel, Jean.

I looked at them, then said to Lloyd, "Are they virgins?"

Kath said, "What kind of nut is this?"

Jean said, "Is he trying to insult us?"

Carol said, "Peace, man."

Rachel said, "Ain't he beautiful?" She came to my side, running her fingers through the hairs on my chest.

"Is this your harem?" I asked Lloyd.

"Only Kath. But listen," Lloyd said to the females, "you wouldn't believe what Hero just did." And he gave an account of our exploits.

The young women smiled and giggled a lot, and I presumed this was an effect of the smoldering parchment-rolled weed which they passed from one to another, inhaling deeply. Rachel put the thing to my lips, and the breath I took resulted in a severe bout of coughing, much to everyone's amusement.

I too smiled. After what I'd been through that day — and my adventures had begun long before Vad Granite magicked me between the interstices of the space-time continuum — there was nothing I desired more than a swift roll with three lusty lasses. As Rachel had the biggest breasts of the trio, I would start with her.

"You," I said to Jean, "cook me something to eat. A leg of venison will do. You," I said to Carol, "fetch me a quart of your best ale."

Before I was able to give Rachel her commands, she took hold of my wrist and led me out of that room into another one.

I noticed that the woman was made no differently from those on Venhea — though on such a world as this I wouldn't have been surprised to discover the mythical horizontal opening. We fitted together nicely, sweating and jerking about in a most pleasant fashion. Rachel's performance was a little disappointing, because she reached her peak after a few hundred strokes and then swiftly lost her

enthusiasm. She rolled away, eyes closed, lips smiling. Soon she was asleep.

"Where's that ale?" I queried at the top of my voice, and shortly Carol entered the room.

She looked at me, at Rachel by my side, at me again, her eyes lingering on a prominent part of my anatomy. Then she handed me an ice-cold metal container, cylindrical and sealed at each end. It was wet with condensation, ornamented with a heraldic design and curious hieroglyphics. I shook it, hearing the splash of liquid within.

"Open it."

Carol folded back a small hoop at one end of the cylinder, tearing it open. Spray burst from the hole that appeared, followed by bubbles of pale foam. She gave it to me again.

I tipped the contents down my throat. The cold liquid froze my taste buds, and for all the flavor I could discern I might have been drinking from a stagnant puddle; the texture was thin, the alleged ale barely stronger than goat milk. It assuaged one of my thirsts, however.

Tossing the container aside, I grabbed hold of Carol's ankle and tripped her down onto the mattress. Putting my lips to hers, my hands tugged at her garments.

Carol was somewhat more athletic and lively than Rachel, but her

stamina no greater. She too quickly moaned and groaned, slid away and slept.

"Hey!" I yelled. "Where's my food, woman?"

Jean arrived, holding a bowl of hot eatables and a spoon. She stared at me and the naked women on either side but said nothing, handing me the bowl.

"What's this?" I said, poking at the contents with my eating utensil. It looked like roasted maggots.

"Macrobiotic rice. You know, yin and yang. We're all vegetarians."

"A pox on your heathen religion! I want real food, not this chicken feed." But as I spoke I gobbled down both yin and yang, my hunger forcing me to eat.

I glanced up, and Jean was by the door. "Hey!" She stopped, and I muttered a swift incantation. Nothing happened.

"What?"

"Is there more?" I held out the bowl, and the girl came back to collect it. As she reached me, I got to my feet, picked her up, then carried her across the room to an empty mattress lying on the floor.

She shouted and kicked, scratched and bit — but only because she thought she ought to, without her heart in it. I stripped her naked, tearing off the strange clothes worn by Californian women. Then the oddest, most worrying,

most frightening event in my life occurred: I couldn't take her. My manhood refused to be aroused. I couldn't understand it; I'd only been through two women thus far, but felt as though I'd already satisfied a score.

Jean seemed more amused than angry.

"No need to get uptight, man," she said. "What do you expect after those two? Use your imagination. Like this."

Then she did the most unbelievable thing — a deed never heard or dreamed of on Venhea. And in return I devoted my efforts to accomplishing a similar feat.

Afterwards I felt exhausted.

Yes, there was definitely something very wrong. During my transference to California I'd been drained of almost all my strength. When I'd opened the police car door, the simple force required had been too much; I soon discovered I'd fractured my wrist. It would heal in time, but it was my sword arm and would never be as good as before. When I returned to Venhea I'd no longer be the undisputed sword champion.

When — or if?

Because I'd tried a simple spell on Jean as she stood by the door after bringing my food: the spell for making a woman's clothes vanish. But it hadn't worked, and neither did any of the other minor enchant-

ments with which I experimented.

Reluctantly, I was drawn to the conclusion that here was a world without magic.

Instead it was a place where mechanical artifacts and devices really worked: guns and cars and artificial ale.

Without the aid of sorcery to help me escape, I'd be trapped here forever. Doomed. Cursed to spend the rest of my days on the benighted planet of California.

But if I was stuck, I ought to make the most of my new circumstances. Perhaps on California I could recover my birthright and rise to become king — a heritage denied me when my father had been so treacherously slain and when I'd escaped with only my life and had begun my wanderings and adventures. If I slayed the king in single combat, I could replace him. Or possibly I could depose the monarch after marrying his daughter, to ensure a legitimate claim before committing regicide.

"Who is the king of this land?"

"King? We don't have a king. That's for Europe and those places. This is America."

"America? That is the name of this land?"

"Stop fooling about, man, course it is. Today's Tuesday. It's 1967."

"1967? You mean your world is

only one thousand nine hundred and sixty-seven years old? That would explain why it's such a backward planet."

"Just where do you come from?"

"Far enough. How many lands are there on California?"

"What kind of question is that? You mean in California."

"No. We're on the surface of the planet, not inside — aren't we? California is the name of your planet?"

"No," said Lloyd or Kath or Carol or Rachel or Jean.

"Oh," I said thoughtfully.

It took me a long while before I got most of it straight in my mind. About how this world was called Earth. How California was only one of fifty states which made up a country called Yuessay, which in turn was only one of more than a hundred countries on Earth. California was the richest, strongest state in Yuessay; and Yuessay — the inhabitants of which were called Americans — was the richest, strongest land on Earth. It seemed that I'd arrived in the right place, and my next task was to discover the best way to become Warlord of Earth.

"So the king of Yuessay is called the President?"

"Sort of."

"How does one become the President?"

"You get elected, voted in for four years by promising to please all the people all the time. But you have to be rich to buy enough votes."

"The man who kills the President, doesn't he take his place?"

"No — though it doesn't sound such a bad idea."

"Does California have a king?"

"A governor."

"Is the title hereditary?"

"No."

I gave up any thoughts of assassinating the President of Yuessay or making nuptial arrangements with the Californian governor's daughter.

"But the real power isn't held by the President. He's just a puppet in the hands of the corporations, like the senators and mayors and judges. The corporations own everyone and everything."

"The Americans are the slaves of these corporations?"

"Sure, I guess we are. We work in their factories, down their mines, on their farms; and we have to buy whatever they produce."

"Pay tribute to them, you mean?"

"Dollars we call them. Industry doesn't make what people want, it manufactures whatever gives it most profit. Then through advertising it persuades people that these are things they need, they can't possibly exist without. The more they

sell, the more profit they make, and the tighter becomes the noose around our necks."

Such was the place where I was trapped, basically no different from my own world, and what I must do was obvious: continue the battle I'd fought on Venhea.

The war between Order and Chaos knows no boundaries. It is universal; fought on every galaxy; each atom. It was my duty to throw my knowledge and skills into the turmoil on Earth. Here it was known as the second law of thermodynamics: the natural state of matter was chaos, all things tending towards randomness and disorder. By resuming combat, I would be hitting back, if only in a small way, at the foul magician who'd so treacherously cast me onto the primitive world of Earth.

The titanic struggle here was infinitely more complex than the one I was used to. Back home it was army against army, sword against ax, wizard against demon, fertile field against jungle and swamp. Earth, however, was a much younger world, and the two sides hadn't properly resolved themselves into opposing forces. Instead, the struggle took place in hundreds, thousands of minor skirmishes.

I had not yet decided upon the

role I was to play for my eternal exile — whether to be a rock star or drug pusher, urban guerrilla or Zen Buddhist — and to help me find my true purpose in life, Lloyd was demonstrating the expansion of consciousness, which involved the consumption of cubes of sweetness called sugar.

Slowly I felt myself slipping away ... over ... upwards ... beyond ...

And then I was on Venhea again, back in Vad Granite's subterranean cavern, my sword in hand. Without hesitation I decapitated the wizard and laughed as his blood spurted all over me.

Earth was a realm of impossibilities, California but a mythical land, such fabulous adventures mere legends from the dawn of time. Vad Granite had tricked me in a vain attempt to save himself. Yet my mind was too powerful for him to snare for more than a moment — though subjectively that moment had been stretched a millionfold.

I went back the way I'd come searching for someone else to kill, a battle to fight, a castle to besiege, a monster to slay.

It was good to return to reality.



SECOND TO THE SKUA

The other day I visited the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum in Washington and was fascinated by the wealth and variety of its exhibits.

It was, in a sense, a paean to space flight, and I kept wondering what the reaction would have been to an article that described the Museum exhibits accurately, but had been published in 1938 as a prediction of the next forty years.

It would have to describe close-up photographs of Mercury, space-suits, control panels of spaceships, an actual spaceship in which astronauts had lived for three months, and many other things.

It would surely have seemed like a mad pipe-dream, and if someone had taken the role of good old hard-headed* Senator Proxmire he would have waxed merrily sarcastic at the expense of "crazy science fiction."

Yet the most astonishing thing I saw at the Museum was a celebration not of spaceflight but of its two centuries of prolog. It was a movie entitled "To Fly" shown on a fifty-foot-high screen. For thirty minutes I saw views of the Earth as seen

**I have often thought that the hardest head is one that's bone from ear to ear.*

ISAAC ASIMOV

Science



from a balloon, from a man-carrying kite, from a stunting biplane and so on. The views were an incredible vision of beauty that I know I'll never see in real life since I am determined to let nothing get me off the ground.

Did the vision fill me with delight and make me vow to fly? Not a bit! Incredibly beautiful though it all was, I sat white-knuckled in my seat with my intestines spontaneously forming square knots and half-hitches. You can't argue with an acrophobe.

And similarly, not all the photographic views of the frozen grandeur of Antarctica ever elicits within me even the slightest desire to visit the place in person. I am content to write about it without seeing it.

Last month I brought the history of Antarctica up to the 1840s, when explorers had nosed about its shores sufficiently to reveal the fact that what occupied the South Frigid Zone was frozen land of continental size.

While this was a brand-new extension of the human range — for until the 19th Century no human being, no hominid even, had ever been within sight of Antarctica — it was not an extension of Earthly life.

The shores of Antarctica and the ocean that washes those shores teem with life.

This is not surprising. Whereas most solids become more water-soluble as temperature rises, gases become *less* soluble as temperature rises. The freezing water of the polar regions carries 60 percent more dissolved oxygen than does the tepid water of the tropical ocean surface.

Since, except for some bacteria, life depends on oxygen, the polar ocean blooms with microscopic life, which in turn supports the larger life that feeds on it, which in turn supports still larger life, and so on.

It is in the polar regions and, particularly, in the Antarctic that you would expect to find a food supply rich enough to support the larger whales. In the Antarctic, you will find the blue whale, which can attain a mass of 130,000 kilograms (150 tons) and which is the largest animal that has ever existed.

Of course, whales are thoroughly aquatic and are creatures of the sea only. They are never actually inhabitants of even the edges of Antarctica.

Some aquatic animals are less thoroughly adapted to the sea and must come out on land at least to breed, and for some of these the Antarctica shores are the breeding ground.

Of the forty-seven species of seals, for instance, five are native to the Antarctica shores. The most common is the crab-eating seal (which does not eat crabs).

More spectacular, though, is the leopard seal, which is the most dangerous carnivore of the family. The leopard seals will eat sizable birds and fish without discrimination and need fear no enemy of their own other than the still larger, and more dangerous, killer whale (which is, in turn, altogether immune to predation, barring the interference of human beings).

The most Antarctic of the seals is the Weddell seal, which never leaves the shores of Antarctica and, indeed, prefers to remain under the coastal ice. In that watery sub-ice world, it finds the fish and squids it feeds on; it finds warmth (the water may be freezing but it is considerably warmer than the sub-freezing atmosphere) and it finds enclosing darkness and security.

It must, of course, breathe air, so it bites through the ice here and there to make blow-holes. It makes occasional blow-holes large enough to work its entire body through if it must clamber onto the ice surface.

For males this doesn't happen often. Weddell seals can dive to a depth of 600 meters (2000 feet) and, at need, remain submerged for nearly an hour, though ordinarily they come up for air every 10 to 30 minutes. The female, however, must spend much more time on the ice than the male does for only there can she bear and feed her young.

Whales and seals are the only Antarctic mammals, but there are, in addition, fifteen species of flying birds that are found in the Antarctic region. The one most at home over the continent is a predatory gull-like bird called the skua.

The most characteristic life-form of the Antarctica land-mass is, however, that group of flightless birds we call penguins.

There are seventeen species of penguins altogether, all of them native to the Southern Hemisphere. Of these, two species actually live on Antarctica. The smaller of the two is called the Adélie penguin, because it is found in Adélie Land. The Adélie penguins congregate in crowded nesting sites ("rookeries") on bare ground some small distance inland. The full-grown Adélie is about 45 centimeters (16 inches) tall and weighs 6 to 7 kilograms (14 to 16 pounds).

While the Adélie penguins are on land, they are reasonably safe. There is nothing to eat on land, however, and they must dive into the ocean to catch the fish they live on. Usually, just off-shore are the watching leopard seals, and the penguins must run the gauntlet if they are to eat. Overhead, too, are the circling skuas, watching for a chance to feast on the eggs and chicks.

The second of the Antarctica penguin species is the Emperor penguin, the largest of all living penguins. These stand over a meter high (3½ feet) and weigh, at times, as much as 35 kilograms (75 pounds). There are, however, fossils of penguins, now extinct, that stood 1.6 meters (5¼ feet) high and weighed as much as 110 kilograms (240 pounds).

The Emperor penguin rookeries are, astonishingly enough, far inland, sometimes as much as 80 to 130 kilometers (50 to 80 miles) from the shore. The Emperor penguins must walk to the rookeries, and it can take them nearly a month to make the trip. Indeed, Emperor penguins are occasionally found as far as 400 kilometers (250 miles) from the nearest coast, still stubbornly trudging along — the farthest south any non-flying vertebrate is known to have reached independent of human beings.

During this walk, the penguins must fast since there is no food. Once at the rookery, the female lays her single egg and then begins the long trek back to the sea — and food.

The male, however, remains behind to incubate the egg. To do so, he places it on the upper side of his flat, webbed feet, immediately next to a bare patch of skin on his abdomen, and places a fold of feathered skin over it.

The male must keep the egg in place for some sixty days, during which he has no choice but to continue his fast, until the female returns and takes over, by which time the egg is near to hatching. The males can then, at last, head for the sea, which they finally reach after a four-month fast during which they have lost 25 to 40 percent of their weight.

Naturally, to make this weight-loss tolerable, the male Emperor penguin must gorge himself to the limit before waddling off to the rookeries in the first place. If, through misadventure, a particular male's particular consort doesn't return (no other female will do), the male, after reaching some critical point of weight loss, must abandon the egg and head for the sea. It means the growing chick must die, but if the male does not abandon it, it will die anyway and the adult with it.

When the chick hatches, the mother feeds it with food it has stored in its crop during its sea-feast, but this won't last. The father must return and for a while, the parents take turns walking to the sea, gorging, and returning to feed the chick.

By the time the Antarctic summer arrives and the coastal ice begins to break up, the chicks are large enough to walk to the sea on their own, but by that time fully one fourth of the chicks have either failed to hatch or have died after hatching.

In order for an Emperor penguin chick to be large enough to make the long walk by the beginning of summer, the whole process must have begun while winter was approaching, and the male penguin must have incubated the egg through the depth of an Antarctic winter.

The males can waddle clumsily about, without dropping the egg, and all of them huddle together in a feathered mass to endure the whistling gales of up to 150 kilometers (95 miles) an hour at temperatures that go as low as -60 C. (-75 F). The penguins within the mass are, of course warm enough, but those at the boundaries of the huddle get the full force of the wind and constantly try to waddle inward. The whole mass of birds maintains a slow circulation that sooner or later brings every single one to the boundary for his fair share of frost.

One might assume that the Emperor penguin, as a species, was lunatic to choose this way of life; but, of course, it did not choose. Ecological pressures forced it, very slowly, into this particular niche, and adaptive change, both biological and social, kept up.

And, believe it or not, the niche has its advantages. The very horror of the environment lends the Emperor penguin in his rookeries an almost absolute security, for no other complex form of life (barring an occasional human being or wind-blown skua) ever invades that niche.

It was about the Emperor penguin incubating its egg, that Shakespeare might truly have written:

*Here shall he see
No enemy
But winter and rough weather.*

The forms of life I have mentioned are all either sea creatures or creatures that reproduce on land but must look to the sea for food. Are there any true land organisms on Antarctica, organisms that do not depend on the sea in any way?

If Antarctica had a solid ice cover, the answer would be no, since life must have liquid water to exist. Antarctica has bare patches along its coast, however. The largest bare patch is at McMurdo Sound at the eastern edge of the Ross Ice Shelf, where a stretch of ground 150 kilometers (95 miles) long and 15 to 25 kilometers (9 to 15 miles) wide is exposed. It is about as large as Rhode Island.

There are ice-free "oases" in Antarctica's interior, too. Some of the mountaintops are blown free of ice and stand bare under the sky, and there are even ice-free spots here and there in the valleys. All the bare land

of Antarctica put together comes to about 7500 square kilometers (3000 square miles). This is almost the area of Puerto Rico — in an ice-covered vastness which is one and a half times the size of the United States.

As a matter of curiosity, the southernmost bit of exposed land in the world is on Mount Howe, and it is only 260 kilometers (160 miles) from the South Pole.

Some of the oases contain lakes, very small ones usually, which retain liquid water through the Antarctica winter, perhaps through leakage of Earth's internal heat. One such body, San Juan Pond, is about 2000 square meters (half an acre) in area and has an average depth of 0.15 meters (6 inches).

Bacteria, of course, live wherever it is in the slightest degree possible that they can. There is one species of bacteria, for instance, that is found in San Juan Pond which, in addition to its undesirable location, is loaded with calcium chloride. (That helps it stay liquid. Adding calcium chloride to water lowers its freezing point substantially.)

Altogether, some 200 species of freshwater algae grow in places in Antarctica where there is exposed water. In some cases, such algae spread outward onto the nearby snow. Where there is some exposed soil, any of 400 species of lichens and 75 species of moss can be found.

There are even two species of flowering plants on the Antarctica Peninsula, which stretches its thin length outside the Antarctic Circle. One of these plants is a variety of grass, the other a relative of the carnation.

Lichens have been detected on bare rock as close as 425 kilometers (260 miles) to the South Pole. That, as far as we know, is the closest land life has ever been to the South Pole independent of human activity.

Where plants exist, animal life is bound to exist, too. With the utterly insignificant plant cover of Antarctica, however, nothing larger than tiny animals can be supported. The only land animals native to Antarctica are 70 species of mites and primitive insects. The largest native land animal of the continent is a wingless fly half a centimeter (a fifth of an inch) long. One species of mite has been detected only 680 kilometers (420 miles) from the South Pole. No other land-based animal has ever been closer to the Pole, independent of human interference.

We can now return to the human invasion of Antarctica.

Up to the very end of the 19th Century, no real landing had been made on the continent within the Antarctic Circle. Davis (see last month's essay) had come ashore on the Antarctica Peninsula, but his landing site was,

technically, in the South Temperate Zone.

In the Antarctic summer of 1894-1895, however, a Norwegian whaling ship, commanded by Leonard Kristenson, visited Victoria Land on the rim of the Ross Sea and there, on January 23, 1895, a party alighted and stood on Antarctica. They were the first human beings ever to stand on continental land south of the Antarctic Circle.

One of that party was the Norwegian, Carsten E. Borchgrevink. He returned in 1898 and, with nine other men, wintered in Antarctica. It was the first time human beings ever remained on Antarctica for any extended period.

Until that winter, all Antarctic exploration had been conducted by ship. Borchgrevink put on skis, however, and set off on the first attempt to penetrate southward by land. On February 16, 1900, he attained a southern mark of 78.8 S., which was farther south than any ship had ever managed to penetrate. At that point he was only 1150 kilometers (710 miles) from the South Pole.

Borchgrevink's feat fired the ambition of others, and more sledging expeditions were planned. The obvious goal was the South Pole.

In 1902, a British explorer, Robert Falcon Scott, led a sledging expedition across the Ross Ice Shelf and, on December 13, 1902, they reached 82.28 S., only 800 kilometers (500 miles) from the South Pole. Human beings had certainly come closer to the South Pole by then than any land vertebrate had ever succeeded in doing. Scott's group had out-pengued the hardest Emperor penguin who had ever lived.

One of Scott's colleagues, Ernest Shackleton, led another try for the South Pole in the Antarctic summer of 1908-1909. On January 9, 1909, his party of four men managed to reach 88.38 S., only 155 kilometers (100 miles) from the South Pole, with each man dragging his own sledge. Not even the tiniest mite had ever made its way closer than that to the South Pole. Shackleton and his men had broken the record for all forms of land life, plant or animal.

Still, they fell short. Shackleton was forced to turn back once it was clear that to travel farther would mean that the food supply would not last the return journey.

All was now set for the final push. Two candidates were in the field. One was Scott again, and the other was the Norwegian explorer, Roald Amundsen.

Amundsen concentrated on dogs. He set off on October 20, 1911 with fifty-two dogs pulling his sledges. This was a shrewd move, for he did not

need to carry much food for his dogs. They were carnivorous, after all, and as he proceeded, he killed and fed the weaker dogs to the stronger ones. Between that, and the fact that the dog-drawn sledges would move faster than human-drawn ones, there was no danger of being forced back by a shortage of the food supply.

Amundsen reached the South Pole on December 14, 1911, left his marker there, and then began the return trip. It would have been dangerous to linger. He hastened back for the coast and safety, and reached it on January 21, 1912. He still had twelve dogs surviving, and food left over. His expedition had suffered not one human casualty.

Scott planned his expedition differently. He had fewer dogs, but he had ponies in addition, and motorized sledges as well. He started inland on October 24, 1911, four days after Amundsen.

Motorized sledges would have been perfect, if they had worked, but this was 1911 and the state of the art had not moved far forward. All the motors broke down in fairly short order.

Then, too, the ponies were a miscalculation. They were herbivores and fodder had to be carried for them. They had to be shot when there was still nearly 500 miles to go because there was no more food for them. The dogs might have been fed on horse-meat, but there weren't enough of them to serve the purposes. They were sent back with some of the men. The last 650 kilometers (400 miles) had to be traversed by man-drawn sledges.

Finally, Scott and four companions reached the South Pole on January 17, 1912, and found Amundsen's marker there. He had been there five weeks earlier.

The five men had to find their way back to the coast, with no animals and with their food supply dangerously low. One man died soon after the return journey started and a second, L. E. G. Oates, feeling he was weakening, deliberately walked off into the snow and cold to die so as to be no burden on the others.

The last three might have made it, but a blizzard struck when they were only eleven miles from safety and pinned them to their tent. Day after day, they made ready for the final lunge and day after day the blizzard monotonously continued. It lasted nine days, and in the course of that the three men died of hunger and exposure on or about March 29, 1912. With true British understatement, Scott's last diary entry read, "It seems a pity, but I do not think I can write anymore."

Yet if human beings had finally reached the South Pole, we, as a species, were, like Scott, only second to the pole.

To be sure, human beings (and their dogs and parasites) were the first land organisms to stand at the pole, but not all organisms are tied to the land.

The skuas, skimming through Antarctica's air-space, range all over the continent, and it seems inevitable that every once in a while one of the birds has flown over the South Pole. They are the only species of living creature that has reached the South Pole independent of man, and there is no question, obviously, that they have reached it first.

Great as the human accomplishment is, we have, in this respect, been but second to the skua.

But wait. We are talking about Earth as it now is. The South Pole has always been where it now is, relative to the Sun (if we allow for the regular changes of the precession of the equinoxes, nutation and so on) for perhaps four billion years at least.

Antarctica, however, hasn't.

The Earth's crust is cracked into about a dozen good-sized plates. Driven by some internal engine (perhaps the slow circulation of material within the Earth's mantle, itself powered by Earth's internal heat), these plates shift position. They pull apart at some joints, while magma wells up to form volcanic areas. They crumple together at other joints, forming mountain ranges — or else one plate may dive under another to form oceanic trenches.

And on the plates are the chunks of continental granite, riding high on a bed of sea-floor basalt. Slowly, the continents approach each other and recede, and every once in a while they come together in such a fashion as to form a single super-continent called "Pangaea" (Greek for "all-Earth").

Some 225,000,000 years ago, the most recent Pangaea existed, and ocean water rolled over both poles. What is now the Antarctic Ocean was ice-covered as the Arctic Ocean is now, and, undoubtedly, under the ice there was a varied sea-life in existence so that myriads of life-forms preceded both skua and human beings at the South Pole.

But Pangaea broke up, and its portions, on different plates, moved apart ("continental drift"). About 40,000,000 years ago, one fragment of Pangaea broke up into Madagascar, Australia, India, and Antarctica. India veered northward and finally collided with Asia to form the great Himalayan mountain range at the crumpling line of collision. Antarctica moved southward for a rendezvous with its frozen destiny.

For millions of years, though, before Antarctica moved through the

Antarctic Circle and over the South Pole, it had a mild climate. In the days when amphibians ruled the land and early reptiles were beginning to appear, it must have teemed with life.

Scott, himself, the tragic second at the South Pole, had come upon a deposit of coal in Victoria Land in 1903 — and where there is coal there was once copious plant life. This, in itself, proved that the Antarctic was warm in times past, or that Antarctica wasn't always in the Antarctic. For half a century, it was the first guess that was the popular one, but for the last twenty years, we are convinced that it is the second that is correct.

Nor could the coal have originated in some way not involving life. Fossilized trunks of trees have been found, and imprints of leaves on rocks. The prints are detailed enough to be identified as having been formed by leaves of "Glossopteris," a plant that flourished in the tropical jungles of Africa and South America 225,000,000 years ago.

Where plants exist, animal life is sure to exist as well, but Antarctica is not exactly a happy-hunting-ground for paleontologists. Ice, kilometers thick, covers the ground where fossils might be found — but not absolutely everywhere.

In December 1967, a New Zealand geologist, Peter J. Barrett, came across something on Graphite Peak that looked like a pebble, but turned out to be a fragment of bone that was eventually identified as a part of the skull of an ancient amphibian called a "labyrinthodont." Others began to comb the area, and in March 1968, the American paleontologist, Edwin H. Colbert, discovered the lower jawbone of a labyrinthodont in a cliff about 520 kilometers (325 miles) from the South Pole. The jawbone was surrounded by fossils of swamp plants.

The jawbone was quite like the labyrinthodont relics located in Africa, Madagascar, and Australia, and the labyrinthodonts were fresh-water creatures who could not have crossed oceans. Their existence in all these places showed that the land must once have been a single piece and offers the best proof that continental drift had actually taken place.

In 1969, fossil fragments of a small hippopotamus-like reptile called "Ilystrosaurus" were discovered at Coalsack Bluff, about 650 kilometers (400 miles) from the South Pole. Then, on November 10, 1970, James Colinson discovered the first complete vertebrate fossil ever found in Antarctica, a foot-long "cynodont," a mammal-like reptile.

It seems quite obvious, then, that however desolate Antarctica is now, it was once rich with life. If we could dig straight down from the South Pole, that spot reached, after so much effort, by human beings, we would

Here is a first rate story about a radical experiment in which a criminal undergoes a death experience "in a therapeutic context." It is the first of three stories we have bought from James Kelly, a new writer with a bright future. Mr. Kelly lives in New Hampshire and is now working on a novel.

Death Therapy

by JAMES PATRICK KELLY

Carla Walsh stayed in bed as long as she could, trying to put off the start of her day. She considered calling in sick but knew she wouldn't; she had never taken a sick day in her life. At nine thirty the clock radio buzzed and the man on the government station began to announce the news. She went into the kitchen and filled a cup with steaming water from the tap. While her tea steeped, she made a miso and bean sprout sandwich for lunch; the institute's cafeteria closed on weekends. Carla was getting bored with her new diet, but the thought of eating dead flesh repelled her. She drank the tea slowly, lighting up a trunk when the cup was half empty. Then she showered and began to dress.

Carla Walsh was a tall lean woman who at one time might have been strikingly pretty. Now she stood slump-shouldered and her delicate features had hardened into

a thin bony mask. She chose from her small wardrobe impatiently; she found it difficult to be interested in clothes today.

At the end of her driveway she stopped to check the mail and found a letter from Jack among the bills and advertisements. She put the mail on the seat beside her and pulled onto the narrow highway.

Before she and Jack had separated, Carla had planned to take a staff position at Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston. Now she was no longer sure that that was what she wanted. She hated the idea of giving up her position at the institute almost as much as she hated the idea of losing Jack for good. Carla had always believed that a doctor should keep her personal and professional lives separate. As she sped down the twisting backroads, she thought grimly that it was much easier now that she had only one life to manage.

She liked to think that Challant was partly to blame. He had recruited her away from teaching and had steered her into her studies of the metabolism of dying. She had been flattered by his personal, almost paternal interest in her career. His praise, however, did little to melt that cold detached feeling she had whenever she and Jack made love after she had spent the day cutting up cadavers.

Her space in the parking lot had her name stenciled on it in yellow paint. She trudged into the main office building, a ferroconcrete dome which nestled into the landscaped grounds like the egg of some great stone bird. In her office she opened Jack's letter and read it with growing disappointment. It was just another matter-of-fact report: a party at Harvard; news of Sherry Fallows, one of Carla's students; gripes about Eggleston, the head of his department at Northeastern. The closest he came to mentioning their problem was to ask when she planned to submit her paper; he wanted to come up and visit when it was done. Despite herself, she was pleased at the thought of seeing him again so soon. The weeks since he had been gone had been long ones.

She opened the rest of her mail slowly, even taking time to read over the titles on the University of Virginia surplus-book flyer. Meyers

interrupted her at eleven fifteen.

"I just gave her the last isotope injection."

"I'm coming."

Clear plastic tubes snaked from the respirator into Alica Bowen's open mouth. Her bluish lips were coated with dried mucus; her sunken chest rose and fell to the machine's rhythm. The room smelled like dirty laundry.

Carla and Meyers dressed for the autopsy. Meyers finished first and went next door to prepare the post-mortem room. Carla drifted reluctantly over to the respirator.

Although still hooked up to the machine, the woman was legally dead. Carla had never known her, but she had come to know the empty husk that Alica Bowen had left behind quite well. She had been found in a Boston alleyway, raped and near death. Only the respirator had kept her alive the past three months. Carla had hoped to bring Alica Bowen's massively damaged brain back to life, or failing that, to show that her techniques could at least begin to replace dead cells. Only last week Carla had been forced to admit that despite signs of cellular regeneration, not even a shadow of a person still huddled in Alica Bowen's ruined brain. The woman on the bed was now only a body, just like the hundreds of dead bodies she had seen in sixteen years

of practicing medicine. It was a thing, not a woman, she reminded herself fiercely. In the next room she could hear the muted rumble of the scanner being moved into place, casters scraping over the floor.

Meyers came back in and nodded.

She felt very calm and in control as she turned the respirator off. It was much simpler than she had imagined. The body gurgled, twisted. Its eyes opened abruptly, glaring without sight. Its legs kicked out weakly, then fell twitching into stillness. The luminous curve on the electrocardiograph went flat, matching the flat line on the electroencephalograph.

They slid the tubes from its throat, loaded the wasted body onto a gurney, and wheeled it into the next room. Beside the marble operating table was a long, lead-lined plastic box. They lowered the body into it, fitting the neck into a rubber collar at one end so that the head hung limply outside the box. Meyers closed the lid and the head jerked upright. Carla pulled the remote unit of the isotope scanner toward the box and positioned it over the forehead. Then they retreated to the control area, a small space filled with computer-linked instrumentation and protected from the rest of the room by a shield of six-inch permaglass. Carla watched as Meyers worked at the computer

console. The scanner swiveled on its flexible arm and began to weave a hemispherical pattern around the head of the dead woman.

Tiny beads of light raced across the main readout, diagramming a delicate tracery of veins and arteries. It looked to her like the clash of frozen lightning.

"Looks like everything is there," Meyers said.

Carla remained silent.

"The first time cranial blood vessels have been regenerated."

"Yeah."

"Ready to open her up yet?"

She took a deep breath. "Give me a few minutes. I'm going out into the hall for a smoke."

She tried not to look at the box and its contents as she walked by. Out in the hall she took a crumpled pack of trunks from her surgical gown. The pack felt empty as she fumbled at it, but there was one left. She lit it eagerly. The mildly soothing smoke helped to distance her from what she had just done. She knew that she could not avoid her guilty horror, only postpone it.

Meyers opened the door. She dropped the butt and crushed it with the toe of her shoe. She could hear the sound of water splashing in the sink.

There was a note on her desk on Monday morning. Challant wanted to see her.

Dr. Edward deQuincey Challant was the most celebrated of the "pragmatic" behaviorists. He had reached the height of his fame in 1982 when his book, *Punished in the Sight of Men*, was a best seller for nine weeks. Challant was asked to serve on a presidential commission to study the federalization of the prison system and three years later was named Director of the Institute for the Study of Modern Man.

His office at the apex of the dome was the largest in the institute. It was decorated with a simple elegance that came naturally to Challant, whose breeding was an easy mix of Brahmin and Harvard. In the center of the room was a slab of quarter-inch permaglass mounted on a sculptured chrome pedestal. Challant always kept it scrupulously free of clutter; the only papers he allowed on his desk were the ones he was working on. The curved wall behind the desk was floor-to-ceiling permaglass filled with a magnificent view of Mounts Washington and Adams. Challant was surveying his view when Carla entered. He swiveled in his chair and motioned her into one of the chrome and leather Eames chairs in front of his desk. He had a full head of silky white hair and a pink wrinkled face. Tinted rimless glasses made his gray eyes seem vague and slightly out of focus.

"Good morning, Doctor," he said. "How was your weekend?"

"Terrible."

"Insomnia again?"

"Yeah."

He sighed. "I know it's not my place to say this, but you really should consider cutting down the time you spend here. Six days a week is too much — even for you."

"I don't think it's too much," she said stiffly. "I have a job to do and I do it."

Challant paused, then nodded with reluctant approval. "Have the Bowen tissue samples come back from biopsy yet?"

"Not that I've heard."

"Meyers came in this morning raving about the deep circulation."

"Oh, the circulation was great. I bet we find some trace isotopes in the brain cells themselves." Her voice was flat, uninterested.

"Did you have any of the problems we discussed? You still feel that this was the only way to end the experiment?"

"I felt that way on Saturday."

"And today?" She thought for a moment. "Today, I'm glad that it's over. For her. For me."

"I've notified the family. They're coming for the body this afternoon."

She gazed out at the mountains.

"How's the paper coming?"

She grimaced. "I'm out of practice. I forgot how hard it is to put

words down on paper."

"I know what you mean." He chuckled. It was a dry, humorless sound. "But there's no rush to get it out. As a matter of fact, there's something else I'd like you to look at. Something important." He pushed a thin book bound in plastic across the desk to her. She glanced at the cover: "Proposal to Study Certain Behavior Modification Techniques, submitted by ISMM, Inc., September 11, 1988." Stamped across the bottom of the cover in green was the word "Secret."

"When did we get into the spy business?"

"You'll understand when you read the proposal. I heard from the Justice Department this morning; they've given a verbal commitment to the project. I want you to head the medical team." His smile was meant to be disarming; Carla hated it. "Spend some time looking this over, and when you finish it, we'll talk."

Challant's manner irked her. Whenever he gave her an assignment, he acted as if he were doing her a favor.

"I'll try to get back to you sometime today."

Back in her office, she began to read the proposal resentfully, thinking more of the summary chapter of her paper than of the words in front of her. By the end of

the first page she had forgotten all about her own work.

"... In the case of sex criminals, statistically the group most resistant to rehabilitation, you can attempt to shape their behavior into a normal pattern of sexuality, or you can punish deviant behavior. While the former is impractical in a prison situation, the latter has never enjoyed statistical success. The problem is that negative reinforcement has never been powerful enough to overcome the primal drives which give rise to deviant behavior. The acts of the sex criminal are expressions both of sexuality and the instinct for aggression. Such primal drives cannot be bottled up by relatively weak negative reinforcements such as prison and electroshock.

"The proposed treatment counters the sexual and aggressive drives with an aversion stimulus of greater magnitude. It has been theorized that all anxieties in the human organism are derived from the fear of death. Yet Arkad and Fritz's studies with alpha-capability telepaths demonstrate conclusively that the death penalty is not an effective deterrent to crime because the human organism is incapable of conceptualizing its own death. The proposed treatment permits the sex criminal to undergo a death experience in a therapeutic context. Revivification under con-

trolled circumstances is a straightforward application of existing medical technology."

She read the proposal through twice. When she finished with it she threw it at the wall. It skidded across the floor on crumpled pages. Her hand trembled as she lit a trunk.

At first she was tempted to tear the proposal up and dump the shreds on Challant's desk. That's what Jack would have told her to do. She realized that he was right about one thing at least; some part of her which she rarely let to the surface had always distrusted Challant.

She left her desk and paced. This was not an experiment; it was torture. She remembered something that Betty Kerin, her advisor at med school, had told her. She said that no one becomes a doctor unless she has very strong and very personal feelings about dying, and no one becomes a good doctor until she tries to understand those feelings. At the time Carla had thought it very wise. Recently she hadn't thought much about it at all. The realization chilled her.

She crossed over to where the proposal lay, picked it up, brushed the gray wisps of floor dust from it and straightened its pages. She placed it next to her typewriter and sat down to type her letter of resignation.

There was still a page in the carriage with half a dozen lines of typing on it: her final report on the Bowen experiment. She stared at the long blank stretch of paper, then reached to pull it out of the machine — too late. She looked right through the blankness on the page into Alica Bowen's mindless, haunting stare. An accusation? Who was she to judge this experiment?

She got up and began to pace again. She carried a tissue in her hand, crumbling it tirelessly. Finally, when she calmed down, she sat at her desk and tried to consider Challant's proposal objectively.

She drew a line down the middle of a sheet of graph paper and put a plus sign at the top of one column, a minus on the other. On the minus side she wrote the name Betty Kerin in bold letters. She studied it for a few minutes, then circled it. In the plus column she wrote:

"Death Penalty favored in polls
— will pass soon

Let prisoners make own decisions

Possible success of therapy =
??%

Who finishes paper? Meyers?
Challant?"

As she stared at her list, she realized that there was no good reason she could give Challant for refusing his offer, because her decision would not be based on pro-

fessional standards, but on personal prejudices.

"Ah, Carla. I'm glad you're back," Challant said, stacking the papers he had been reading and placing them in his briefcase. "Have a seat."

She remained standing. Challant's smile of greeting died painlessly. "Was it a difficult decision?" he said.

"I'm not sure I've made a decision yet."

"Oh?" He stared at his shoes through the desk.

"What I mean is, I'm not convinced by this." She placed the proposal on the desk distastefully. "What makes you think this can work?"

"Oh, I see." He rose and walked around her towards the door. "Have a seat on the couch over there and we'll talk. Coffee?"

"No," she said icily.

He was gone briefly. She heard him tell his secretary not to disturb them as he backed slowly into the room. He pushed the door shut behind him with his foot while balancing a thick green file and a mug of coffee. When he turned to face her she was still standing at the desk.

"Come now, Doctor," he said shuffling over to her carefully. "No confrontations. Please." He smiled and sat on the long, low-slung

couch which faced the window wall. She crossed the room reluctantly and took the opposite end.

"Well?" she said.

"You want me to justify the project, is that it?"

She nodded grimly.

"All right." He took a sip of coffee. "When I was with the prison commission, I was shown intelligence reports on the Soviet prison system. I can't say how the information was obtained, because I didn't want to find out." He shrugged. "But I — we all accepted it as valid."

"They started experimenting with the treatment in the early eighties. Apparently they now have some sort of prototype facility in operation in Aikhal, Siberia. They claim a success rate of about seventy percent, working almost exclusively with political prisoners. Just what they call a success, I can't really say."

"And that's it?"

"Oh, no. There's much more," he said dryly. "You see, I soon found out that they expected me to evaluate the Soviet therapy for application to our own prisons." He glanced at her, then looked away. "I expect you know how I felt when this happened. After all, we're not Nazis. We don't torture people just to try out some lunatic scheme. But I had second thoughts. Aside from killing my chances of ever working

with federal money, what would I accomplish by quitting? Wouldn't it be better to put this ridiculous theory to rest myself?"

"He took another sip of coffee. "Two things have happened since. I served out my appointment to the commission. I toured most of our larger prisons, talked to the staff, the prisoners. I saw that we were already involved in torture, more subtle perhaps, but torture all the same. When you lock a man up in a dead-storage bin and tell him that he's damaged goods And they're crowded. Oh Lord, they're jammed in there like cattle in a slaughterhouse."

He paused. Carla thought sourly that sometimes his act was just a little too slick to be believable.

"After that," he continued, "I didn't want to judge the Soviets. I still thought their approach was wrong, but I didn't want to judge them. I convinced the people at Justice that I would need time and resources to study the therapy properly. They generously arranged for me to come here. I've been at it three years now, and I've done everything short of running a test subject through the therapy. And I'm convinced that it can work."

"You can document that?"

Challant hefted the fat green file and laid it on the couch. She made no move for it. His face was expressionless; he was waiting.

"Okay," she said. "But even if it does work, so what? It's still not worth it. People get out of prison eventually. You want to burn a trauma in their minds that they can't forget, ever."

"You already know the answer to that," he said softly. "They're going to pass it, Carla. They've held off as long as they dared, but too many people want the death penalty legalized. People with money. People with votes. The economics of our system demand another way of handling criminals, and the only other way is to kill them."

He leaned forward, looking directly at her. His gaze flustered her slightly; Challant never made and held eye contact so aggressively. Her face began to feel uncomfortably warm.

"I've spent three years preparing for this experiment. Helping you along with your studies of dying was part of my preparation. No matter what you think of it, your work has been important. In time you will succeed with it. Science will be richer for your success, and you — you will probably be famous." He looked away. "I'm sorry to have to say this, Carla, because I like and respect you. But if you don't work on this project, someone else will. The institute wouldn't be able to afford both of you."

Carla didn't reply for several minutes. "All right," she said final-

ly. The words seemed to stick in her throat. "But skip the threats from now on. I'm with you only as long as I can see positive results."

"You're sure?"

"I'm sure for now, Doctor. I'm not making any promises."

Challant took off his glasses and rubbed his eyes. "It's been a hard day, Carla. First Washington, now you." He put them back on. "I believe in this project. I believe in Doctor Carla Walsh. I'd like a firmer commitment, but I guess I'll take what I can get. For now." He slid toward her end of the couch, and they shook hands without enthusiasm.

"If you have some time," he said. "I'd like to get your opinions on some technical matters."

"Go ahead."

"I take it you have no problem with electrocution as the means of death."

"No. That seems the best way. What you want is ventricular fibrillation, disruption of the heart's co-ordination. Cardiac arrest usually takes place within three to five minutes."

"Cardiac arrest isn't what we want though. The Soviet experiments used brain death as a determinant. I think we should count on at least five minutes of flat EEG. They report a phenomenon they call 'cellular shock' after that, which is what we want."

"That's very tricky. You run the risk of brain damage."

Challant stood and strolled over to the window wall, hands clasped behind his back. In a flat voice he said, "There's another team, in New Mexico, working along similar lines. They've already done several cardiac-arrest experiments, and they're not getting anything near the behavior modification that the Soviets report. They're looking for a brain-death expert now."

"I see. Okay, flat EEG." Carla thought briefly. "Is there any reason why we can't depress the central nervous system? Barbiturate poisoning impedes the decay process."

Challant turned to face her. "I'm not sure that's possible. I'll be using memory drugs for hypnotherapy, so I'll need at least some kind of stimulant for the final phase of the experiment."

"No, no, that's okay. We could use an amphetamine sulfate, say, amobarbital. And we could probably cover ourselves by reducing body temperature to, say, ninety degrees, right after cardiac arrest. Now, what about subjects?"

He crossed the room and opened his files. "I've already solicited volunteers. I've selected — he checked the name — "Michael Huxol as our first subject. Judging from his interviews with the prison psychologists, he should be recep-

tive to this kind of therapy. Here's his file. Take it home, look it over, and get back to me as soon as possible if you have any objections."

"What are you going to tell him?"

"Well, we can't very well tell him exactly what the experiment is about. He was told when he volunteered that there would be personal risk involved. He was also told that there was a chance that his sentence would be commuted if the experiment was successful. The rest he'll just have to find out as it happens."

Carla nodded and thrust completely out of her mind what little sympathy she had for the volunteers.

She built a fire in the fireplace that night and made herself a rum toddy. As the drink began to burn into her, she remembered the letter from Jack. She would have to write and tell him that she was getting involved with a new project. She imagined him reading her reply; the thought made her uneasy. He would take it the wrong way. He would think that she wasn't serious about wanting to try again. She thought of calling him but knew she wouldn't. She disliked talking to people she couldn't see, and she dreaded long silences on the telephone. There had been too many long silences the last time.

She realized that she wanted to see him, to have him sitting there next to her so that she could explain exactly the way she felt with her hands, her mouth, her body. She went over to the mantel. There was a picture on it. The two of them sat, cross-legged and smiling, at the top of Mount Monadnock. Far below them the lowlands rolled to the horizon in a shag of orange, brown and yellow. The longer she stared at them, the more unreal those two smiling faces became. They belonged to a pair of improbably characters in a fairy tale where everyone lived happily ever after and where saying "I love you" was the easiest thing in the world.

She went back into the kitchen to make herself another toddy. When she came back, she opened Huxol's file and began to read.

Michael Huxol was twenty-eight, weighed 140, stood nearly six feet tall, had black hair, brown eyes. Since high school he had lost a variety of jobs in the federal work program. He had been accused of rape twice before the Lorenzo murders; both cases were thrown out for lack of evidence. On February 20, 1986, in Worcester, Massachusetts, he had followed Lenore Lorenzo, a twenty-two-year-old bank teller, home from work, forced his way into her apartment, raped her, then strangled her and her mother, Maria, age sixty-one. He had been

booked for the murders two years later when he had been picked up in Boston for procuring. He was convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment at the U.S. Correctional Institution at Walpole, Massachusetts.

Carla was surprised at the pictures in Huxol's file. They showed him to be a rather ordinary looking man. She couldn't see rape and murder in his thin, frightened face.

She put the file away and tried to read herself to sleep. Halfway through a text on cerebral localization, she realized that it was useless; she was only getting bored. She fixed herself a toddy with a double shot of rum and began a long and loving letter to Jack.

Carla stepped into the doorway and saw that they were waiting. Huxol was sitting on the examination table, naked. His gaunt body was partly covered by the thick black hair which curled from his pasty skin. His newly shaven head made his face seem impossibly large. A gray-uniformed security guard stood off to one side of the table, smoking a trunk and tapping the ashes on the floor.

Huxol saw her first.

"Who's that?" His surprisingly low-pitched voice shook.

The guard turned, dropped the smoke behind him and stepped on it as unobtrusively as he could.

Carla ignored him.

"I'm Doctor Walsh," she said, approaching Huxol. "And you're ..."

"Go away. Please. You're not the doctor." He shrank from her, sliding backwards on the table and covering his groin with his hand. He looked to the guard for support.

"It's all right, Huxol. This won't take long. It's just a routine examination." She edged into his line of sight; he jerked his head away.

"You, Huxol. Get up! And pay attention to the doctor." The guard came up behind him and shoved him off the table. Only the balls of Huxol's feet touched the floor as he hunched over, eyes lowered. His face flushed with embarrassment.

Carla was getting impatient. "Come on now, Huxol. I'm not going to hurt you." He did not respond. "Look at me when I talk to you."

He raised his head until he met her gaze directly. She felt her throat tighten; a wave of revulsion washed over her. She was looking at a different man. He was shockingly ugly: just being near him made her feel unclean, nauseated. The muscles of his jaws began to work hypnotically. She had trouble breathing. His eyes raked down her body like claws, and his hunger, perverse in its animal ferocity, became her hunger.

He looked away.

She staggered as if he had let go of a rope on which she was pulling with all her strength. The guard moved quickly, grabbed Huxol's shoulder and spun him back against the table.

"Hey! Can't I trust you for a second? What did you do to her?"

"Nothing. I didn't do nothing."

Carla leaned against the wall, breathing heavily. "It's okay. I just feel a little ... faint. I'll be fine in a minute." She managed a grim smile.

The guard backed away uncertainly, and Huxol got up, resuming his normal slouch and rubbing his back. She waited uneasily for another storm of horror to burst inside her. Nothing happened. Huxol seemed now as he had before: scared, helpless, inoffensive. All she felt for him was pity. She told herself reasonably that she had imagined the whole thing and carefully avoided looking him in the eye again.

She ran through the standard tests quickly: lung check by percussion, blood pressure, reflexes, eye, ear and throat inspections. She took blood and urine samples and scraped some tissue from the inside of his mouth. As usual she saved the most difficult for last. She pushed his head to one side and then felt his groin for lumps.

His penis started to get hard.

"Cough ... again ... again. Good."

It stuck straight out. She glanced at his face. His eyes were clamped shut and there were tears on his cheeks.

"Okay, Mr. Huxol. We're finished in here."

He looked like a little boy caught by his mother playing with himself in the closet. She put on her best professional smile for him, dug into her pocket, pulled out her pack of tranks and offered him one. He goggled at her, astonished. He let her light it for him and then sucked greedily at it.

"Let me find you a dressing gown and then we'll take some x-rays. Okay?"

There was no compelling professional reason why Carla had to see Huxol once she completed her examination. Yet she found that she was with him several times each day, if only for a few minutes. In the mornings he struggled through the battery of tests which the staff had prepared for him; in the afternoons there were long and exhausting hypnotherapy sessions with Challant. Carla insisted that she, and not Challant, administer the memory drugs before hypnotherapy. Often she monitored their sessions on closed circuit; Challant's relentless skill at stripping away Huxol's defenses made a fas-

cinating, if somewhat repellent show. She made daily stops at Huxol's heavily guarded room when she arrived at the institute and when she left for home. He asked for a trunk whenever he saw her. Once he even smiled and said "Thanks."

The week of preparation went quickly. Challant predicted that Huxol would respond to the death scenario as if it were real. He was still confident that the experiment would succeed. Carla was less sure.

The moment of terror she had experienced the first time she had seen Huxol haunted her. She steadily lost her battles with insomnia, especially after she dreamed that Huxol raped her. She wanted to discuss her reaction with Challant, but not until she understood it better herself. She pored over Huxol's files again, this time paying closer attention to all the clinical data in his psychological profile.

She spent a whole morning on the phone with the court-appointed psychologist who had testified at Huxol's trial. She borrowed some books from the institute's library. When she was sure of herself she went to see Challant.

She found him watching a tape of the day's hypnotherapy session. Despite the rows of folded seats, the audio-visual theater did not seem quite empty. The room swallowed

up sound as if it were jammed with people. Huxol's outsized face filled the screen, soundlessly convulsed with laughter. She crossed the back of the theater and climbed the stairs to the projection room. The muffled hysteria of Huxol's taped voice filtered through the door. She knocked.

The laughter stopped and the face on the screen froze. Its eyes bulged, its cheeks bunched tightly, its mouth gaped. It was a face in transition; Carla could imagine it continuing to laugh or beginning to cry when the tape started again. She heard footsteps. The door opened.

"Carla?" Challant's brow wrinkled with annoyance.

"Who were you expecting?"

"No one. I wasn't expecting ... come in. Come in and have a seat. Did you see anyone at the door?"

She shook her head.

Challant scowled and turned away into the brightness of the projection room. Carla entered, blinking, as he picked up a phone at the control desk, jabbed out four digits, spoke briefly into the receiver, then slammed it into its place.

"Sorry. There's supposed to be a guard out there." They sat facing each other on folding chairs. "Now what can I do for you?"

"I have some questions I hope you have the answers to."

"I'll do what I can."

"Does Huxol show up on any of the psi scales?"

"Why, yes. He's at least two standard deviations above the mean on all of them."

"Could he project?"

"Project? Thoughts? Perhaps, after a few months training at one of the psi labs."

"I don't mean with training. I mean now."

He leaned his chair back, studying her curiously. "I doubt it. No, I take that back. He definitely couldn't do it now. There has never been any documentation of psi capability without biofeedback training."

"I think we have some here." She told him about the incident with Huxol in the examination room and her discussion with the court psychologist. He listened politely but impassively. She wondered anxiously what he thought of her story, then decided it was too late to stop.

"Okay," she said. "So there's not much question that Huxol has psi potential. Suppose he has much more than shows on your tests. Suppose he's fighting an alpha-capability just as hard as he can. Why? It gets out of control; it wrecks his life. Sometimes he does project his mental states, when influenced by specific stimuli. Sexual stimuli. I bet he can't approach a woman in a sexual context without

transmitting his ... his lust. Pent-up, ugly, frightening lust; I've experienced it. He's probably never been able to have a loving relationship with a woman."

"So?"

"So! Did any of what I just said make sense to you?"

"Some. I'm interested in your conclusions."

"My conclusions. Okay. If I'm right, then this whole therapy is wrong for Huxol. He needs to control his ability before he can resolve his sexual problem." She paused, frowning. "Also your experimental results will be worthless if you don't look at the relationship between the telepathy and the criminal record."

"Anything else?"

"No. Yes, yes, I think that the experiment could be dangerous. How do we know he won't broadcast his death experience? And what would that do to anyone who received it?"

"And so you'd like me to postpone the experiment."

"You don't believe a word of this, do you?"

"I believe that you're serious." Carla tried to hold in her anger; she hated, above all things, to be patronized. Challant seemed to think she was a little crazy. "But to answer your question," he said gently, "no, I think you're mistaken. I can't believe Huxol has psi capabilities until you can tell me where he

was trained. I've been with him for six days now, and I know some things about him that even he doesn't know. I've seen no evidence of alpha-capability telepathy. And even if he had it, which he doesn't, he would still need this therapy. I'm convinced of that. As for broadcasting his death experience, it's impossible. He'll be heavily drugged; all studies indicate that drugs effectively inhibit the alpha-capability."

Carla was subdued. "And what about my reaction to Huxol?"

"I have my own theory about that. You won't like it."

"Try me."

He shifted uncomfortably in his chair. "Alica Bowen died the night she was raped. You couldn't accept that, you thought she was still alive. When your experiment failed, you felt like a murderer." He paused. She sat very straight, very still. Her eyes were two pools of blackness. She nodded tightly for him to continue. "Michael Huxol is a rapist and a murderer. He didn't kill the Bowen girl, but some part of you would like to think that he did. That part of you needs to find the real murderer so that you can share your guilt. You meet Huxol for the first time. Something happens between you. I heard that Huxol had an erection when you examined him. In your mind, this becomes the psychic rape you talk about. Your guilt ..."

"Stop it." She spit the words out.

They sat, not looking at each other, for several minutes. The silence was as painful as a scream. Finally Challant got up and went over to the control desk. He held a button down, and the stopped image of Huxol on the screen accelerated to a blur. When the tape finished rewinding, he pulled the cassette from its slot and pocketed it.

"I'm sorry I had to say that, Carla. Look, things will go off tomorrow without a hitch and we can forget about this."

She said nothing.

"I haven't told you before," he said, sitting next to her again, "but we're in trouble in Washington. They don't understand our work and they're getting impatient. With this team in New Mexico moving so quickly, everything here has to happen on schedule. That means tomorrow we put Huxol through a death experience."

"I'm going now." She rose quickly and turned away from him.

"We can't do it without you, Doctor."

"I'm tired. I'll see you in the morning." She was out the door before he could reply. She trudged blindly through the empty corridors; as usual, she would be one of the last to leave. They should give me some kind of award, she

thought bitterly. She stopped at her office to get her briefcase. The phone rang. She tried to ignore it, couldn't.

"Walsh speaking."

"Carla? I guess I should've known you'd be there."

"Hello, Jack." She sank wearily into her desk chair and tried not to sound like she wanted to hang up.

"I got your letter."

Pause.

"Oh."

"Dammit, Carla, don't you have anything else to say?"

"I said it all in the letter."

"No, you didn't say it all. You didn't say anything. You went on and on about how much you missed me, and then you said you weren't coming down here. What's this new project you're on?"

"Oh, come on, Jack. What's the use?"

Pause.

"I'm coming up, let's see ... uh ... Thursday's the soonest. Day after tomorrow."

"You can't come then. I've got something important on here."

"Skip it." He sounded angry.

"Can't. It's the new project. I can't talk about it, I can't skip it, and you can't ..."

"I'm coming up. Thursday afternoon."

She didn't want to make any final decisions over the phone. She still wasn't sure what her final de-

cision was going to be. After she finished tomorrow, there was no reason why she couldn't drop everything, go back to Boston with him that night. It was a nice thought, even though it sounded a little far-fetched.

"Okay, Jack. Thursday."

"I want you to take the day off, understand?"

"Okay, Jack."

Pause.

"I still love you, Carla. I want you back."

"I've got to go. Good-by." She held the receiver away from her ear until she heard his distant "Good-by," and then she hung up.

Since the mysterious project had been the subject of much gossip, Challant scheduled the final session for Wednesday night. At eight-thirty they brought a pale Huxol down to the infirmary for a final checkup and his injection. He held his slight body defensively throughout the examination, as if he expected someone to hit him. As soon as Carla finished with him, Challant and a security guard whisked him away for a final hypnotherapy session.

She went directly from the infirmary to the makeshift control center which had been set up in the audio-visual projection room. The room had been completely sealed off from the theater; the only way to

see the lecture platform and the screen was through the television monitors in the corner. Challant had ordered that the rear screen projector be used for the experiment. He did not want to take the chance of having any lights distract Huxol from the death scenario.

They had made the lecture platform over to look like a stage. Sue Jacoby, one of the staff assistants, smoked a trunk and tried not to look nervous. Behind her, two security guards were using a folding screen to hide a heavy wooden chair. It seemed to Carla that there were more security guards than staff on this project. One of the guards turned to a camera and signaled to Carla. She pushed a button on the control console, and a curtain fell leisurely in front of the rear screen system.

The phone on the console rang and she picked it up. Challant's voice said, "We're bringing him down now," and the receiver clicked into a dial tone. Carla leaned forward to speak into her microphone: "They're coming."

Jacoby dropped her smoke and stepped on it. One of the guards dragged a chair out into the middle of the room and she sat in it. He tied her up and gagged her. Then he unbuttoned her blouse, fumbling in his embarrassment.

Carla watched the two guards leave through a side door. In a few

minutes Challant, Huxol and another guard entered the theater from the rear and passed down the deserted aisles to the stage. Challant supported Huxol, whose step was wobbly and uncertain. At the stairs leading up to the stage Challant gave Huxol some final instruction, and then he and the guard quickly retraced their steps.

Challant burst into the projection room and slid into the chair next to Carla. He paused to catch his breath, then spoke into his microphone.

"All right, Michael. It's time."

Huxol shuddered, then turned around dazedly. Challant had placed a suggestion in Huxol's mind during hypnotherapy that what he could not clearly see did not exist. To his drugged senses there was no darkened theater behind him; his world was reduced to the span of the brightly lit stage.

He saw Jacoby staring at him, horrified. He climbed the stairs and scuffed across the stage as if he were taking a noontime stroll. She started rocking back and forth in her chair. Her fright seemed very convincing to Carla.

Huxol slapped her across the face. Carla touched Challant's arm to protest, but he ignored her. Huxol put his hand to the woman's reddening face.

He whispered something to her. Challant swore and turned up the

gain on the amplifier.

Huxol's hand slid around behind her neck and loosened the knot on her gag. "What's happening here?" he said as the gag went limp and fell out of her mouth. She screamed. He slapped her again and she choked the sound back. She began to cry.

"This is perfect," Challant said. There was awe in his voice. "This is just what we want."

"Start it now. He's going to hurt her." Carla tightened her grip on his arm.

"Not yet. He's still suspicious. Let the power of the scenario work on him for a bit longer. Once he gives into it completely, he won't be able to tell projected images from real people."

Huxol stepped to one side of the woman. He put his hand on the other side of her face and twisted her head around toward him.

"Who the hell are you?"

"L-L-Lenore. Lenore Jacoby. Please don't. You're hurting me."

He rubbed his hand on her cheek. "Lenore, Lenore," he said softly. His hand wandered down the line of her jaw. "I once knew a cunt named Lenore." His hand was on the curve of her neck. Her eyes rolled up. "You're nice, Lenore. Like the other. Nice and soft." His hand was on her chest, moving down ...

Carla clutched at Challant.

... slipping inside her bra.

Challant punched a button.

"Lenore."

The three security guards rushed onstage. Huxol spun around just as they reached him. They pulled him from the woman, pushed him against a wall and handcuffed him. Two of them held him there while the third untied Jacoby. She staggered off the stage, crying hysterically. Then the guard pulled the folding screen aside to reveal the chair. Huxol recognized the danger in its bundles of wires and its plastic cap studded with electrodes; he tried to lash out at his guards. They dodged his clumsy attempt and threw him up hard against the wall. The third guard rejoined them, and the three of them stripped him, unhandcuffed him and locked him into the chair. He got control of himself and yelled, "No, shit, no! I wasn't going to do nothing. I wasn't." They lowered the cap onto his head, then hurried from the stage.

Challant worked at the console. The curtain rose ominously. He spoke into his microphone: "Michael Huxol, you are going to die."

Carla turned the specially installed cooling system up to its maximum.

A picture flashed on the screen. It was a slide of Huxol's mother and father. Challant spoke into his microphone again, his voice distort-

ed so that Huxol wouldn't recognize it.

"Put your clothes on, son. Don't you have any respect for your mother?"

"I can't. Can't you see? I can't do anything?"

Carla spoke into her microphone: "Michael! Have you been playing with yourself *again*? Put your clothes on right now!"

"Can't." He began to cry in his strange way: tears on a totally indifferent face.

"Now," Challant said. Carla turned a knob on the console up to the halfway mark, then flipped a switch. One, two; three, she counted to herself. She turned the power off.

Huxol writhed in the chair from the jolt. The screen flashed pictures of Huxol in various moods. "Nobody likes you, Michael," Challant said. "Why doesn't anybody like you? Why, Michael?" There was sarcasm in his voice. He motioned to Carla. She turned the knob to three quarters and flipped the switch. One, two, three, four, five, off.

Huxol struggled against the chair, lifting the rear legs off the ground. A white froth gathered at the corners of his mouth and ran down his chin.

Challant swore again. "That chair is too heavy for him to lift. If he disrupts the instrumentation ..."

The screen flashed to a police photograph of the Lorenzo apartment. It was in a wild state of disarray. There were no bodies visible.

Challant's voice was harsh. "Why does everybody hate you, Michael?"

The picture changed to a close-up of the couch. A bare foot stuck into the top corner of the screen. Huxol screamed.

"Because you ..."

Flash. The picture showed Lenore Lorenzo's body. Her skirt was bunched around her waist. Huxol's mouth was still open but no sound came out.

"... hate ..."

Flash. A long shot of the mother's body.

"... everybody."

Flash. A close-up of the mother's face. There was a ring of purple bruises around her neck. Her bulging eyes were glazed. Carla gasped; the old woman had that same horrible death stare as Alicia. Challant reached in front of her, spun the knob all the way to the right, and flipped the switch.

Suddenly she was plunged into a cold, bitter ocean of fear. It seethed with slimy, mindless things like herself. She sensed Huxol and Challant nearby, ripping at each other's faces; and sensing them, she was in the Lorenzo house, killing the two terrified, writhing women with manic glee. As she stood back

to admire her gruesome work, Challant, then Huxol took turns killing them again, until the three stood back, admiring death, admiring. A huge claw punched through their admiration, reached down into their guts and pulled them inside out. They were three gory masses of flesh which mewed as one and grew together. They plummeted, faster and faster, toward a huge gaping maw with a tongue of flame. The tongue licked them and they burned. Then Carla tore herself free of the other two and floated just above the maw of blackness, staring into the blackness until they disappeared.

She drowsed back to reality. She peered at the monitors without comprehending the fact that Huxol had finally tipped the chair over. She thought how angry Challant would be when he found out. Slowly, mechanically, she did what she had programmed herself to do. She focused on the timer which said that Huxol's EEG had been flat for six minutes.

Abruptly, she was fully aware of herself. She turned to find Challant slumped over the console. She felt for a pulse; there was none. She picked up the phone and called the hospital, then ran out the door.

The three security guards were still standing outside the door, waiting for the end of the experiment. She yelled at them. "One of

you come with me. The others get a stretcher and get Challant out front. Ambulance coming. He's in there. Move!"

Down on the stage, she unlocked Huxol from the chair. The guard helped her drag him to the infirmary. She hooked him up to the respirator and began external massage, pressing into his breastbone as hard as she could. Bones cracked. There was no response. A pale nurse stuck her head in the door.

"Dr. Challant is dead."

"So?"

"Couldn't you try to revive him?"

"Go away. I've got a patient already."

"But ..."

"He'd be a vegetable. Out!"

There was a tentative thump which died almost immediately. She kept at it; her arm muscles felt as if they were about to snap. Finally his heart began to respond; there was a regular beat. She linked him to the electroencephalograph. The signal was faint, but still detectable.

Some of the staff members said that when Huxol woke up a few hours later, he screamed in a voice that sounded frighteningly like Challant's. They couldn't get Carla to go down and listen. The next morning some men from the Department of Justice took Huxol away.

When Jack arrived on Thursday afternoon, she was waiting in Challant's office. She had been with the police most of the night, and on the phone to Washington all morning. She felt as if she could stay up for a week.

He took a half step through the open door and peered into the office hesitantly, as if he was afraid of what he might see.

"Come in, Jack." She admired her voice. It was so cool, so much in control.

He entered the room awkwardly, carrying a long flat box behind his back. He smiled and strode across the room.

"Carla! Are you all right? They told me downstairs what happened last night."

"I'm fine. Perfect."

He put the box on Challant's desk. "For you," he said.

She pulled at the ribbon. It fell away and she opened the box. There were a dozen white roses and an envelope in it. She could feel his gaze on her as she read his note: "Carla. There's a vase for these in Boston. All my love, Jack." She

looked up, her features carefully neutral. The tender look on Jack's face quickly hardened. She found this moment, as well, to be simpler than she had imagined.

"It's no good, Jack. I've made up my mind. I'm sorry."

It did not take long for him to get angry enough to leave. She waited a few minutes for the eavesdroppers in the outer office to calm down. Then she buzzed for Challant's secretary.

"Throw these out," Carla said, glancing up from some of the paperwork on the desk, "or keep them yourself. Just get them out of here." The astonished woman snatched up the box and turned to leave.

"Wait a minute. Give those back for a minute, would you?" Carla opened the box and picked one rose from the bunch. She broke the stem in half.

"Go down to my old office and get my bud vase when you get the chance," she said, absently twirling the stem between thumb and forefinger. "I think I'll keep just one for here."

Science (from page 136)

find that any number of creatures had once been on that spot and left their fossils behind, and that they had long antedated skua and human being alike.

But those long-dead creatures had never gotten to the South Pole under their own power.

Antarctica itself, crawling with infra-glacial slowness, had brought them there.

	1	A	2	B	3	H	4	A	5	C		6	C	7	D	8	B	9	B
10	E		11	W	12	E	13	M	14	F		15	J	16	A	17	O	18	H
	19	D	20	C		21	G	22	E		23	G	24	L	25	G			
26	O	27	F	28	B	29	J		30	D	31	H		32	L	33	G	34	H
	35	M	36	J		37	G	38	B	39	M	40	A	41	R	42	M	43	M
	44	P	45	I	46	C	47	K	48	L	49	P		50	N	51	K	52	U
53	P	54	U	55	M	56	Z		57	M	58	R		59	O	60	Q	61	Y
62	A	63	N	64	L		65	K		66	F	67	W	68	I	69	N	70	P
	71	Q	72	R	73	B	74	X	75	U	76	Q		77	O	78	R		
79	T	80	V	81	S		82	T	83	Q	84	T	85	E		86	T	87	L
	88	H		89	Z	90	+	91	T	92	Z	93	O	94	W	95	Y	96	C
97	Y	98	Z		99	+	100	W	101	J	102	A	103	Y		104	E	105	X
	106	W	107	R	108	S		109	V	110	W	111	B	112	V		113	D	
114	U		115	Z	116	+	117	P		118	U	119	M	120	+	121	Y	122	
123	Y	124	S	125	W	126	J		127	+	128	*		129	O	130	*	131	X
132	*		133	+	134	X		135	+	136	H	137	L	138	+	139	#	140	
141	+		142	D	143	O	144	K		145	#		146	+	147	#	148		
149	*	150	#	151	Q	152	X	153	Z	154	#	155	W						

Acrostic Puzzle

by Rachel Cosgrove Payes

This puzzle contains a quotation from a science fiction story. First, guess the clues and write the word in the numbered blanks beside the clues. Put these letters in the matching blocks in the puzzle. (The end of the line is not necessarily the end of a word. Words end with black squares.) If your clue words are correct, you will see words forming in the puzzle blocks. If you can guess some of these words, put the letters into the blanks for the clues, over the appropriate numbers. This will help you to guess more words. The first letters of the correctly worked clues spell the name of the author and the title of the sf work from which the quotation is taken.

A. What Relief never is.

62 16 40 102 1 4

B. Nebula winner.

9 73 111 8 38 2 28

C. SF anthology.

20 5 96 46 6

D. Susan's interest.

7 30 142 113 -19

E. Crystal-lined hollow nodular stone.

85 12 104 10 22

F. What Saturn's rings are.

27 66 14

G. Lessen.

33 21 37 23 25

H. SF phenomenon.

31 88 34 18 136 3

I. High.

68 45 122

J. "A ____ in the House." C. Simak.

29 36 101 126 15

K. Android (slang).

65 47 51 144

L. What Harlan needs for screaming.

32 48 137 64 24

M. Astronaut (homonym).

39 35 42 119 57 55 13 43

N. Burned remains.

50 69 63

O. 2001 man.

26	143	59	17	77	93	129
----	-----	----	----	----	----	-----

P. "Weapon Shops of _____."
A. E. van Vogt.

53	117	70	44	49
----	-----	----	----	----

Q. Kind of typing used by writers.

76	60	83	151	71
----	----	----	-----	----

R. Every good story needs this.

78	107	58	41	72
----	-----	----	----	----

S. What M guards.

108	81	124
-----	----	-----

T. Zelazny's final prince.

79	86	84	91	82
----	----	----	----	----

U. SF editor.

114	75	54	52	118	87
-----	----	----	----	-----	----

V. "... Companion to _____" (sing.).

80	109	112
----	-----	-----

W. To the point.

67	155	100	94	11	110	125	106
----	-----	-----	----	----	-----	-----	-----

X. "Ancient my _____" - G.R.D.

131	105	134	74	152
-----	-----	-----	----	-----

Y. Spoofs many diplomats.

97	95	61	123	103	121
----	----	----	-----	-----	-----

Z. What the non-metric worm did.

92	89	153	115	98	56
----	----	-----	-----	----	----

*. Law man!

130	128	132	148	149	140
-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----

+. Ocular.

90	99	127	141	133	120	138	146	116	135
----	----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----

#. Willie Wonka's creator (first name).

150	147	145	154	139
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(Answers will appear in the August issue.)

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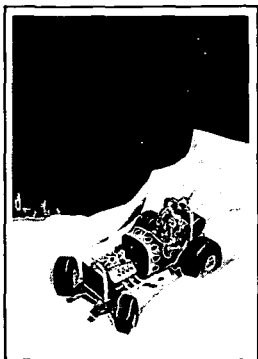
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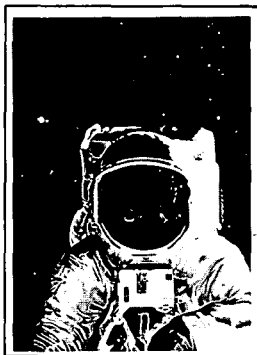
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